

God's Kindness and Severity

Romans 11:11-24 (09/01/13)

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Dr. Charles Feinberg was John MacArthur's beloved professor at Talbot Seminary. Dr. Feinberg was a Jewish Christian and a brilliant scholar. Shortly after God saved my wife and me back in 1971, we traveled to America's Keswick in New Jersey to hear Dr. Feinberg. I remember him as short, rotund man with a scrunched up face, but when he began to speak, the Word of God just poured out of him. On September 20 of this month Chosen People Ministries is dedicating the Charles Feinberg Messianic Center located in the heart of orthodox Jewish Brooklyn, home of 750,000 Jewish people. It will serve as a training center in Jewish studies.

I say this to introduce us to our passage this morning. Romans 11 clearly teaches that God has a plan for Israel in the future. Back in Genesis 12 God called Abraham and promised to give him and his offspring a land, many descendants, and that through him all the nations will be blessed. For the next 2000 years God worked with this nation of Israel. God called Israel His chosen people. Jesus our Savior came to us through the line of David. He came destined to sit on David's throne and rule over Israel forever, and He still will. But when Jesus finally came, Israel delivered Him over to the Gentiles to murder Him.

On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:23 Peter stood and fired this salvo to the Jewish leaders, "This *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, **you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.**" This was Israel's transgression, their failure, their loss! Later in Acts Paul took the gospel first to the Jews and a good number believed in Christ. But by the end of Acts the Jews had pretty much rejected the gospel and God brought Titus and his forces to Jerusalem to destroy the temple and slaughter thousands of Jews. The church ever since has been mainly Gentiles. It's been a rough 2000 years. Jews have been mistreated and vilified. Anti-Semitism to this day is strong among the nations. The Jews are finally back in their land as of 1948, and the Arabs and Muslims mostly want them destroyed and pushed into the sea or wiped off the map! Modern Israel is often at the center of international news.

Where is God in all this? That's our passage this morning. God planned Israel's rejection, for your blessing! We'll hopefully break this down so we can apply some truths to our lives and leave here rejoicing in our sovereign God this morning.

First, God knows how to bring good out of evil – Israel's rejection of Christ has brought riches to the Gentiles vv. 11-12.

I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!

Remember the Joseph story? His brothers sold him into slavery to Egypt. Exalted to the top of Egyptian government, Joseph provided a haven for his people. When Jacob died, the brothers feared Joseph's revenge. But Joseph assured them, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good!" And God has done exactly the same thing through Israel's rejection of Christ. They were guilty. They transgressed. They lost. It was a horrible thing Israel did to their Messiah. They stumbled, but did they fall into the abyss of historical oblivion? Are they no longer God's chosen people?

What does Paul say? For the tenth and final time in Romans: "Don't even think about parking there!" Absolutely not! Israel will always be God's chosen people. Why did God sovereignly plan for Israel's rejection? So you and I could be gathered here today! For the last 2000 years Christ and the gospel

have enriched the world! It was Christianity that tamed the wild hearts of the nations. The gospel transforms lives. Down through these last 20 centuries Christ has brought untold blessing and transformation to people around the world. Look at verse 12, “riches for the world...riches for the Gentiles....” You just see the personal, sovereign hand of God as He moved the focus of the gospel from Israel to the Gentiles. This is why John Paton can go to the New Hebrides and see savages come to Christ. Jim Elliott gave his life for the Auca Indians, who later submitted to the gospel. David Brainerd brought the gospel riches to the American Indians and God gloriously worked in their lives, turning them into Brainerd’s praying Indians. Adoniram Judson went to Burma, Carey to India. The first missionary to leave America’s soil in 1782 to bring the gospel to Jamaica was the former slave George Leile. Judy Wampler is headed to Lithuania, some of you to South Africa, to other parts of Africa, to Brazil, to China. Why has the last 2000 years been mainly a Gentile enterprise? Because of God’s sovereign plan that Israel would stumble and reject her Messiah. God rerouted the river of the gospel and the riches of Christ over to the Gentiles, and we’ll see He will move that river powerfully back to Israel again in the future! God knows how to bring good out of evil!

We need to think about these riches of Christ for the Gentiles, even beyond our own salvation. The gospel has enriched the world! We can’t imagine a world without the gospel. America’s greatness did not come through Mohammed! Christianity brought the hospitals, the orphanages, the compassion and care for all people, the concern for education of the masses so they could read their Bibles, the work ethic, the idea of capitalism and limited government and freedom of conscience and the end of slavery and concern for human life and most of the blessings of western civilization which we take for granted! We have been enriched by Christ and the gospel and the Word of God. When Berlin fell, the savage Russian foot soldiers flooded into the city and raped thousands upon thousands of helpless Berlin women of all ages. Communism has never enriched the world. American soldiers are not without fault, but who would you rather have taken you captive, a Jihadist or an American soldier?

Has not Christ brought you the riches of eternal life? Forgiveness? Hope in the face of death? He brings the riches of new hearts that learn to love and forgive and live with joy and peace and patience. Savor the riches of His promises. You are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. Your God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. You can cast all your anxieties on Him knowing He cares for you! He who began a good work in you will complete it. The peace of God will keep your hearts and minds in Christ. You are rich! We are rich!

Now, look at the end of verse 12 – what will their fulfillment be? If the gospel has so enriched the world where it has flourished, imagine the riches of the gospel flooding this world when God turns that river of redemption full speed ahead into the hearts of many, many Jews. This is what Peter was talking about in Acts 3:20-21:

*Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that **times of refreshing** may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until **the period of restoration** of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.*

Those times of refreshing and that period of restoration are exactly what Paul is talking about in verse 12. The disciples asked Jesus in Acts 1:6, “Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” What does Jesus say? He doesn’t say, “You’ve got it all wrong, fellows. There’s not going to be an earthly kingdom for Israel.” No, He simply says, “It’s not for you to know the times and seasons God has appointed.” For now it’s time to go preach the gospel, and that continues to today. We don’t know when Christ is coming back and the kingdom will be restored. Just keep preaching the gospel!

Second, God’s riches in your life should have influence for Christ wherever and whenever you live – vv. 13-14

But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them.

Paul delighted in the ministry God gave him to take Christ to the Gentiles. He calls it his ministry, “diakonia.” The word means to serve tables. Paul took the riches, the gourmet food of the gospel to the Gentiles and in doing so wanted his fellow Jews to see how glorious Christ was. I saw a gourmet barbecue chef preparing a salt-crusted chicken. He packed kosher salt all around that chicken so that it looked like a big snow ball. Then he slid it into his outdoor oven and I’m sure the end result was mouth-watering. Paul was serving up Christ to the Gentiles. The gospel is the best food there is and you need it! There is nothing better than Christ in this world! That’s what we should do! Go around letting people know how wonderful Christ is, how He has given you hope and joy and restored your marriage and how you’re not living with all that bitterness anymore. And while you often stumble around, you wouldn’t trade Christ for any amount of money in the whole world!

Like Paul, we need to magnify our ministry. We want to attract Jews and Gentiles to Christ and save some of them. A meal, a plate of cookies, a phone call, a mother who lovingly cares for her husband, a husband who is faithful and happy with his wife, all because of Jesus! Christ died for you to turn your life into a fertile garden where He is growing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and people see how different you are. We want people to get jealous of our Lord. If someone followed you around for the last week, think they’d want what you have? Or would they say, “Man, stay away from me; whatever it is you’re living for, I don’t want it.”

Notice how Paul says, “and save some of them?” We believe in God’s sovereignty, but we also believe God calls us to do all we can to win people to Christ. We don’t want our lives to be a reproach to the message of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 9:22 Paul says, “I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some!”

Third, God’s plan started with Israel, not Gentiles – the lump and the tree. vv. 15-20

For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear;

“Their acceptance will be life from the dead.” In Ezekiel 37 Ezekiel preaches to that valley of dead skeletons and life begins to come into them. Verse 14 says so very clearly, “I will put My Spirit within you and **you will come to life**, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and done it,” declares the Lord! This has never happened. Can you imagine if 1000 Jews in 144 cities around the world came to Christ and began preaching the gospel and many, many Gentiles and Jews came to Christ and there was an incredible revival of true, gospel, grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone biblical Christianity around the world! This will be a stupendous manifestation of the power of God on the souls of men, right in the midst of the awful judgments of the tribulation period. Next week I hope to get into more of the timing of all this, but for now just know that God is going to raise up a whole generation of Jews who become flaming evangelists around the world.

This section is difficult in the details, but not in the big picture. The lump and olive tree go back to Abraham. God set Abraham and his descendents apart for Himself for 2000 years, up to Christ’s first coming. Israel was the lump and the olive tree. In their unbelief God broke off the natural branches and grafted us wild Gentiles into the tree. Now for 2000 years God’s been working on saving Gentiles and grafting us in!

Now hear this – we Gentiles have nothing to be proud about. It’s not like God thought we were better than the Jews. Remember the lady with the demon infested daughter who came to Jesus to heal her in Matthew 15? She cried out, “Son of David, have mercy. My daughter is demon infested!” What did Jesus say to her? “I have come only for the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she kept begging Him. He said, “It’s not good to throw the children’s food to the dogs.” What was her answer? “Yes, Lord, but

even the little puppies at the feet of the children eat scraps that fall to the floor!" Then Jesus gave her what she wanted! That's what we Gentiles are, *kunarian*, little dogs! What a blow this is to anti-Semitism. Don't be conceited, but fear! You're not better than the Jews. At least they are God's favored nation!

Fourth, God's character assures you that your faith or lack of it will have inescapable consequences – vv. 20-24

For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?

Do not presume on God! That's the point. For 2000 years we have actually seen this passage being fulfilled. God's kindness to us Gentiles has been wonderful in Christ. His severity against Israel for her unbelief has been, well, severe. Unbelief is the most damning sin of all.

God isn't saying here that He will cut off those whom He has personally saved. But He will cut off groups who turn away from Him in unbelief, just like Christ warned those seven churches in Revelation 2-3. "If you don't repent I will remove your lampstand!" How many unbelieving mainline churches do we have littering the landscape of America? Even in the past, God has brought His severe judgment on Europe and England and probably right now on America. What happened in New England after the Great Awakening: liberalism, Unitarianism, unbelief.

Praise God for His kindness in good, solid, Bible teaching, gospel reaching churches and ministries across America and in foreign lands. But look at the universities founded to train God's people in the Scriptures and give them tools for gospel ministry that are now completely unbelieving. God cut them off. Harvard University was founded in 1636 with this clear purpose: "Let every student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed to consider well, the main end of his life and studies is, to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life, and therefore lay Christ in the bottom, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and learning!"

Church history is the story of God's kindness and severity as He brings revival and reformation and then cuts off churches, denominations, movements and institutions because of unbelief. In verse 24, you can see how God is going to graft Israel, the natural branches, back into her natural redemptive tree. Even today, when a Jew like Dr. Feinberg turns to Christ, suddenly the Old Testament becomes a new book. In the future, the nations will fit right in, since they have all those 2000 years of history with all the teaching in Deuteronomy and the prophets. They are now blind to their own Scriptures. They'll be like the first century Pharisee, Paul. When God opened his eyes, he immediately began preaching Christ as Israel's Messiah from the Law and the Prophets.

God is going to graft Israel into her own tree. Until then, live your life in such a way that people become jealous of you. If someone follows you around this week, what will they see? Like Paul, magnify your Lord in your world, so others know He means more to you than anything the world has to offer!