



Sermon Growth Guide

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Happy the People | Romans 11:1-12

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Key Verse: Romans 11:12 - “But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!”

Big Idea: Paul grieved Israel’s rejection of the Messiah, yet he saw God’s plan unfolding through the inclusion of the Gentiles and Israel’s eventual return to God. What a glorious story and joyful outcome!

Foundations

God’s everlasting covenant with Abraham and his descendants depends fully on God’s faithfulness to His promise, even when Israel has been unfaithful. Though God clearly punishes Israel for breaking her covenant with God, He refuses to make a full end of her, and plans in the future to restore Israel to a faithful relationship with Himself. Israel’s temporary demotion becomes a benefit for the Gentile world as God opens the doors of mercy to the heathen. As Gentiles stream through the gates of salvation in response to the call of the Jewish Messiah, the Jewish nation itself will be roused by jealousy and so return en masse to God, recognizing Jesus as their true Messiah.

Understanding God’s Word

Together read Romans 11:1-12.

Paul argues that God has not rejected Israel. First, Paul himself is an Israelite who has been saved by Christ. Second, God has “fore-known” Israel, meaning He has chosen them for relationship and will not cast them aside. As in Elijah’s day, God has preserved a faithful remnant, chosen by grace.

While many in Israel rejected the gospel and were hardened in judgment, God’s purposes are not finished. Israel’s stumbling opened the door for the Gentiles, but God ultimately intends to bring Israel to full inclusion among His redeemed people.

Applying God’s Word

How does a deeper understanding of God’s sovereign work in the realm of human salvation affect your hope for the future of our world?

Can the Church ever be killed off by the world, if God is determined to always keep a remnant saved by grace? How about the Jews? What does the truth of “remnant theology” mean for your faith, hope and courage?

If the future of God’s people includes both Jews and Gentiles saved by Christ, how might that impact the way you view the Jewish people today?

Witnessing God’s Word

One central truth of this passage is that the future is not up for grabs. God is in control and will bring His plan to completion. No one is beyond God’s redemption, but pride and arrogance in our own abilities to “be God’s people” is a recipe for disaster.

Where do you see warnings in the Church that Christians believe themselves to be more worthy of God’s blessings than others? Where are we in danger of “stumbling so as to fall”?

Though present-day Israel remains largely secular or anti-gospel, God has promised that He will one day bring them to faith in their (and our) Messiah. How do you navigate the stormy waters concerning the relationship between Christians and Jews, especially in these days of increasing anti-Semitism?

Last week, Pastor Ellen told a moving story about an evangelist, an elderly woman in Vietnam who needed a motorbike to keep sharing the gospel with distant villages. Ellen's trip leader knelt, touched her feet and blessed them, "Beautiful are the feet of the one who brings good news." It was touching. But it begged the question, did she get the bike? Somewhere is there an 85-year-old Vietnamese woman burning down jungle roads on a motorcycle sharing Jesus? We don't know.

You have heard the passage read. Light work for us today on a holiday weekend. I figure, to walk away from this passage with confident understanding, all we need to cover is Christian Nationalism, Virtuous Patriotism, Dispensationalism, Supersessionism, Zionism, Covenant Theology, Antisemitism and just a touch of the philosophy of the German Nazi party. Happy the People. That's today's message. "Happy the people whose God is the Lord." (Psalm 144:15) It's better to be with the Lord than against the Lord, and God, it seems deals with nations as well as individuals. God, it seems, may bless nations, sustain nations, or turn away from nations, all according to his sovereign purposes of salvation. How good it is to be a people walking with God, gratefully aware of his kindness, mercy and love. Happy the people, the nation, whose God is the Lord.

It's fun to be here on the 250th birthday of the United States of America. I hope your weekend included celebration and time with family and friends. Even as we give thanks for the blessings of this nation, we do keep our eyes open to Christian Nationalism. Christian Nationalism sees the U.S. as God's new Israel, God's new chosen people. "God bless America" becomes "Only Americans are blessed." It makes an idol out of the country. Idolatry turns a good thing into a bad god. It is good to love country, but C. S. Lewis wrote, "We all know now that this love becomes a demon when it becomes a god." Creating America is not the reason Christ came. The nations are dust on

the scales compared with the Kingdom of God. So, can we celebrate the Fourth of July? Yes! How? All Christian ethics is love, love for God and love for neighbor. Does gratitude for a person's country fall into love of God or love of neighbor? C. S. Lewis said to keep patriotism in its place, keep it in the category of love of neighbor. Love is not practiced in the abstract. It must have an object. As Christians in this place in this time the target of our love is these neighbors, this nation. What is a nation but people trying to live together? We don't confuse God with country or country with God, but we are grateful that God has blessed and sustained us as a people, and we are determined to love our neighbor. Celebrate. Give thanks. 250 years of free democracy and open worship! And when you look at the flag or fireworks or other symbols, be grateful for God's blessings, remember those who sacrificed to keep us free, and when you see the flag let it be a reminder that Christ has called us to love our neighbors, these neighbors, as ourselves.

Why all that? Obviously because of the day, but also because this passage is about nations, peoples, and how God uses nations to prompt our thirst for him. Bottom line up front: God included the Gentiles in salvation so Israel would turn and be saved. That's what this passage argues. Why didn't Israel turn to Jesus? Time and again in Acts, Paul goes city to city, spends a few days in the synagogue where the message of Jesus falls flat, then turns to god-fearing Gentiles who come to Christ in droves. Why? "I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin." (Romans 11:1) God claimed a people to be his special possession through his covenant with Abraham. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:2-3) The blessing of the children of Abraham

was to make the nations of the world interested, jealous of their relationship with God. Nations will come to find God and be blessed. What happened? Some did. Others resented God's people and antisemitism was born.

Then Jesus came. The Messiah. The fulfillment of prophecy. Did everyone see and believe? No. Some did. But others turned on Jesus, had him arrested, beat him, spit on him, crucified him and rejected him. Some, like Paul himself, chased down believers in Jesus, dragged them from their homes and stoned them in the streets. What now? Will God be done with his people who have rejected his Son? Some say yes. This is called Supersessionism. Christianity superseded Judaism. The promises God made to the children of Abraham are now void, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and are now for Christians only. What then of Israel? Others say no. They see God's work of salvation as a series of distinct chapters, or dispensations. The Abrahamic dispensation is still in effect while the Christian dispensation is also added. From this school, Dispensationalism, comes a brand of Zionism—the belief that the Jewish people must be returned to their homeland promised to Abraham in order for prophecy to be fulfilled and for the end times to come. God deals with the Jewish people the same as ever, they say. Okay. We are throwing a lot of terms on the table. I know you are already thinking about how these ideas play out in the geopolitics of our own times, aren't you?

What about the Jewish people who do not accept Christ? Paul says, "You can't say God rejected them all, because look at me! I believe in Jesus. God grabbed ahold of me when I was running hard away from him." God always keeps a remnant. "I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: 'Lord, they have

killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me'? And what was God's answer to him? 'I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace." (Romans 11:1-5) God has some Jewish people and many Gentiles now in his fold. Why? To abandon his prior commitments? To divorce and remarry after he made his covenant with Abraham and his descendants? No. To prod the people of God to turn from their stubborn resistance to his grace made known in Jesus Christ.

If you have a Bible with footnotes, look at the passages Paul is wrestling with. What books do you see? Isaiah and Deuteronomy, mostly. It doesn't hurt to go back and read the verses in context. In last week's passage, Paul quoted Deuteronomy 32. "Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, 'I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.'" (Romans 10:19) In Deuteronomy, here is what happened. It's this beautiful passage about how God chose and loved and cared for his people, but they turned on him. "They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols. They sacrificed to false gods, which are not God— gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your ancestors did not fear. You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth...They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding." (Deuteronomy 32:16-18,21) Their turning on God led to God turning on them. God decided to penetrate their hardened hearts by bringing other nations into his care. God also answered their resistance with further hardening of their hearts, just like Pharaoh. Not a hateful hardening, but the same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay. If you are

resolved to turn your back, I might just let you go, I might even push, so you get to where you finally decide to turn back to my love. "What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened, as it is written: 'God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that could not see and ears that could not hear, to this very day.'" (Romans 11:7-8) Hardened.

But this is not a permanent state; it's a temporary correction. Paul hopes and believes that the acceptance of the Gentiles will soften the hearts of his Jewish people and they will one day turn, return, to the Lord in Jesus Christ. "Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious." (Romans 11:11) And this final state will be the most glorious state of all: "But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!" (Romans 11:12) God chose the children of Abraham to make other nations jealous for him. Then God saved Gentile nations to make the children of Abraham envious, to rethink their stubborn rejection of Christ. In the end, all of God's promises will be kept, and we praise God that it is never too late for his grace.

Supercessionism says the Jewish people missed the bus. This theology fed into antisemitism that called Jews subhuman, foolish, selfish, corrosive to modern society. The German Nazi party under Adolf Hitler aggravated that sentiment, aroused hatred of the Jews, scapegoated them, isolated them, dehumanized them and then systematically exterminated six million in death camps like Auschwitz and Treblinka. Paul doesn't see them as subhuman. Romans doesn't say they are lost forever. They are separated from God just now, unable to see truth, but there is hope. Dispensationalism and Zionism say the promises of God to Abraham are still in effect, just the same after Christ

as before Christ. Paul doesn't see it that way. Another option, one we teach here, is called Covenant Theology. God's plan of salvation is best understood as a series of covenants between God and mankind, and each of these covenants stack one upon the other, each clarifying the last, from Adam to Noah, Abraham to Moses to David, culminating in the new covenant, the Messiah, Jesus. In God's own way, not a one of his promises will be lost. God will keep his covenants. Paul expressed his hope in Romans—one day, hearts will turn. Happy the people whose God is the Lord. Happy and blessed are those who put their trust in Jesus Christ. Can the blind see? Can the outsider, no people, be brought in? There is hope. Jesus was rejected, put outside, blind, deaf and dumb in death, so we could turn and, believing, become the people of God.