

Has God Rejected His People?

Scripture Text: Romans 11:1-10

Introduction

The last time we were in Romans, I asked if we are rebels. I answered that question, "Yes." We all rebel against God and choose self and sin over Him. The good news of the Gospel, however, is that God saves rebels like us. God rescues those who have turned from Him and who are His enemies. The issue for Paul in this part of the letter is why the Israelites have not in large part accepted the Gospel. Why have God's chosen people not believed in their own Messiah, Jesus Christ? Paul has already answered several objections. Has God's Word failed? No! God is faithful and keeps His promises. Is God unjust? No! God is just and merciful. Have people been sent and the Gospel preached and heard? Yes! God has sent messengers throughout the world to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. People have heard it, but not all have believed it.

Today, Paul raises another question: Does God reject His own people? Does God turn His back on those He calls His own? Rejection is hurtful and it happens in different ways. Think about kids who are chosen to play ball on a team. No one wants to be the kid who sits on the bench throughout the whole game. We all want to be accepted. Think about a friend who turns his or her back on you and chooses someone else over you. You might feel unimportant. You might feel pushed aside. What about a husband or wife who leaves his or her spouse, or has an affair with someone else? The one left behind feels rejected, pushed aside, and unloved. That is what rejection is like. Have you ever felt that way? Do you ever feel like God has rejected you? Today, we look at a passage where Paul raised the question about whether God had rejected His people.

God Does Not Reject His People

The Israelites were God's chosen people. God had chosen them out of all of the nations of the world to be His own people. God made a covenant with them. He gave them His Law. He gave them the temple and the order of worship. He promised to bring the world's Savior through them. The Israelites were a very special people, but, they were also a very rebellious people. They were stubborn. Now that Christ had come, God was bringing salvation to the whole world. God had commissioned His Church to take the Gospel to all the nations. But, God's chosen people were not accepting Jesus. Why? Had God rejected His people, Israel, in favor of other people in the world? Paul opens this passage with a clear and emphatic answer to that question.

Romans 11:1-2 ¹ *I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ² God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel?*

God had most surely not rejected the Israelites. In fact, Paul was proof of this. Paul was a descendant of Abraham and a member of the tribe of Benjamin. He belonged to this

special people. He was proud of his heritage and he grieved that his own people did not believe the Gospel. Paul, who once persecuted the Church, was proof that God can save a destructive person and use him. Paul was proof that God had not rejected the Israelites. In fact, all of Jesus' disciples and the vast majority of the early Church were Israelites. The early Church was built with Jewish people. However, the majority of Israelites had rejected Jesus. They had rejected their Savior and God's plan for their salvation. God had not rejected His people. God does not leave us, but we do leave Him. Israel's turbulent history is a sad story of a people who did well for a while and then left God for other things. They were the unfaithful one who left the loving spouse.

Does God reject the Church? Some church buildings have closed their doors and are an indication that something has changed. Has God left them or have they left God? I do not worry about churches who face the challenges of reaching a different culture or community. Churches have to adapt to change or they will become useless. I am concerned about churches that have lost their way and no longer serve the Master. I am concerned about churches who serve themselves or think it is all about them. These churches turn from God to pursue their own desires. Those churches have left God, but Jesus told us, "Whoever comes to me I will never cast out." (John 6:37) God also promises that He will never leave us or forsake us. (Matthew 28:20, Hebrews 13:5) God does not leave His people. He will lead them through the valley of the shadow of death. He will be a refuge and strength for them and a very present help in time of trouble. The question is, "Are we His people?" Are we following King Jesus? That is the question.

God Has a Remnant of His People

God does not reject His people, but not all who claim to belong to God are His. This is a hard truth that Paul has already mentioned. Not all of Israel was truly a descendant of Abraham and by virtue God's people. (Romans 9:6-8) Look at the following verses.

Romans 11:2–4 ² *God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? ³ "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." ⁴ But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."*

To make his point, Paul quoted an incident regarding the prophet Elijah who had been "very jealous" for the Lord and had killed the prophets of Baal. Elijah was on the run because Jezebel sought to kill him. The people of Israel had forsaken their covenant with God, they had destroyed the altars of God, and they had killed God's prophets. Elijah thought he was the only one left and they were going to kill him, too. He just wanted to die. What would it be like to face a situation where we felt alone? Then God spoke to Elijah, not in a great wind, not in an earthquake, and not even in a fire. God comforted Elijah with a gentle whisper and told him that he was not alone. God had preserved seven thousand men for Himself. Paul's point was that the majority of the Israelites may have left God, but He had a chosen few who still served Him. There was a remnant that was preserved and this was proof that God had not rejected Israel.

Has God preserved a remnant of His Church who have not bowed down to Satan? That might sound strange as most of us probably believe the Church is God's people who are saved and who are going to Heaven. That is true, however, not all who claim to be a Christian truly belong to God. Let me be clear, not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord" truly belongs to the Lord. (Matthew 6:21) There are false preachers, false teachers, and false members in God's Church. There are ravenous wolves among the sheep of God. There are tares among the wheat. Jesus was quite clear that there are such false believers who appear to be His followers but who in fact *have never known Him*. Life would be a lot simpler if we could tell at a glance who the true and the false believers are, but the guide Jesus offered is the picture of a tree. Sooner or later — and it may be a lot later, or it may happen quite suddenly — the fruit of someone's life will appear. You can then tell whether they were real or whether they were fooling themselves and others.

The good news is that there is a group in the visible Church who are truly God's people. There is a group in the visible Church who are truly following Jesus and are about the Master's business. These are the true followers of Jesus Christ and they will have to deal with those who are not really following Jesus until He returns. You cannot rely on the church roll or attendance as your indication of who the real believers are. The only roll that really matters is God's membership roll. The remnant of God's people are on His roll. And so, are you part of the remnant of Israel? Is your name written in the Lamb's Book of Life? Is your name counted among the saints of God? Are you bearing fruit of righteousness? Does your life show signs of a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ? God knows who are His and who are not. How can you know whether you are? For that, let us look at the last part of this passage.

Grace, Not Works, is the Means to a Relationship

As we have seen in Paul's letter to the Romans and throughout Scripture, salvation is the work of God. It is God's work to save people from sin and judgement, but we are a part of the process. Those who call upon the name of Jesus Christ, confessing Him as Lord and believing God raised Him from the dead, will be saved. (Romans 10:9,13) The true followers of Jesus Christ are not a self righteous people who have successfully mastered the Law of righteousness. They are not a people who passed a test or did all the righteous things to be called God's people. They are a people who realized they are lost without Christ and then trusted His work on the cross. Look at the following verses.

Romans 11:5–7 ⁵ *So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.* ⁶ *But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.* ⁷ *What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened...*

The majority of Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. What were they seeking? We saw back in chapter nine that the thing most of Israel had sought was a *righteousness based on the Law*. They tried to earn righteousness rather than pursuing it through faith. Paul went on to say that in so doing, they stumbled over the stumbling stone, which is Jesus Christ. (Romans 9:30-32) And so, being right with God is not a matter of doing all

the right things, but it is a matter of having faith in the right One, Jesus Christ. This is by the grace of God, which is not earned or deserved. Even our faith does not earn God's love. A relationship with God is based on God's grace and faith in Jesus Christ. A relationship with God is based on what He has already done for us through His Son Jesus Christ, not on what we do for Him.

The situation with Israel is not unique to them. Other people try to earn God's favor. People say they believe in Jesus Christ. They say a prayer. They get baptized. People even gather with the church on Sunday, give their money to the ministries of a church, and participate in others ways, and are as lost as the one who never confessed Jesus Christ as Lord. The reason they are lost is because they never really trusted in the Savior. They trust in themselves. They trust in their ability to follow the Law of God. They look at salvation as a list of dos and don'ts — if I pray hard enough, if I read my Bible enough, if I go to church on Sunday — then everything will be all right. That is not the Gospel message. God does not want your good deeds or your name of the church roll. God wants you! If He does not have you, then the rest does not matter. The path to true righteousness is accepting God's grace and having a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ. Do you have that relationship with Him today?

Israel sought the wrong thing. They tried to attain righteousness by their own efforts. Some have failed to find God because they have tried to earn God's favor. Others have rejected God altogether in favor of being god of their own lives. After a while of God pleading with people and being rejected, or after a while of people seeking their own way and not Jesus, their hearts will be hardened. They will grow cold to the pleading of God. They will have eyes that will not see and ears that will not hear. This is the situation Paul described about Israel, and it is a dangerous place to be. People can become so hardened to the Gospel that they eventually do not hear it. Is that you? Is that someone you know? Do you hear Him? Are you seeking Him or are you just going through the motions with no connection to the Savior? Do not rely on yourself. Do not try to earn favor with God, because you can never do that. Accept the grace of God. Have faith in Jesus. Seek Him and trust Him.

Conclusion

In closing, do you feel rejected? Do you feel as thought God has left you? Maybe you have rejected Him. The good news of the Gospel is that God is in the business of saving people. He is in the business of drawing people out of sin and into a relationship with Him. Maybe you feel rejected because you have never turned to Him. Maybe the question is, "Are you His people?" Have you confessed Christ as your Lord and Savior? Are you trusting in His grace instead of your works or are you trying to earn favor with God? Do you think you are good enough or at least not as bad as someone else? Hear the Word of God speak to you. Believe that you are a sinner in need of God's grace. Hear God pleading with you to let go of your sin and turn to Him. Jesus came to seek that which is lost. If you are lost, turn to the Savior. Do you hear His voice calling you? Do not delay. Turn to Him today.

Maybe you have accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior but you feel rejected. Maybe you feel distant from God today. Maybe you need to be reminded of God's promise to you. God does not forsake His people. He does not leave them. We have the promise that He will always be with us and nothing will separate us from Him. If you feel alone, like Elijah in a hostile environment, trust in the Savior who has reserved a people for Himself. The truth is, our Savior is more than enough. Turn to Him in your moments of despair. Turn to Him and pray that He draws you closer to Him. Ask Him to show you any sin that you need to repent. Sin pushes us away from God, but repentance brings us back into fellowship with Him. Turn from whatever is keeping you from fellowship with God and pray He draws you nearer to Him. This is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!