

THAT HE MAY HAVE MERCY ON ALL

Romans 11:1-36
Key Verse 11:32

Lesson 11

'For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.'

I. God's remnant

Paul knew what it was to be lonely. He deeply understood Elijah's sorrowful cry, 'Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me.' Paul had chosen a lonely road when he turned his back on fame and recognition, and on the strong religious and cultural community of Judaism and chosen to follow the Galilean. Where had Jesus led him? Jesus led him to take up the missionary calling which the people of Israel had rejected. Jesus led him into the Gentile world. Because of this, his own people hated him. Because of this, they put him in prison. But Paul knew that in spite of Israel's rejection of the Christ and Israel's rejection of himself, God was working to accomplish his own purposes through his chosen remnant.

Elijah lived during the times of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Jezebel was a dedicated Baal worshiper, and she was determined to turn Israel from the worship of the Lord God of the Bible to the worship of Baal. Baal worship involved drunken orgies and free sex. Male and female prostitutes lived in the temples of Baal. Jezebel put the prophets of Baal on government payroll, and she put a price on Elijah's head. Even though he proved in a dramatic contest on Mount Carmel that the Lord God of Israel is the living and true God, and Baal is nothing, Jezebel didn't care. She still determined to kill God's servant and destroy the worship of God. Elijah stood all alone.

Paul saw his people knowingly reject the truth of God. He felt as lonely as Elijah. But he accepted God's word to Elijah, "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.", He believed that God had spared a remnant, chosen by grace, to serve him those times with the word of God. God would not be defeated by evil. God's servants might lose a few battles, but God would win the victory in the long run. God always works through a remnant. He is not the God of *follow the crowd' or 'majority rule.* He is the God of the remnant. No matter how dark our times may be, let us remain as a part of God's remnant.

2 God's purpose in hardening Israel

The elected remnant obtained salvation, but what about the rest? Paul says the others were hardened. Surely, God wanted them to keep the covenant and become

a nation of shepherds and Bible teachers. He wanted them to be a nation of priests, mediating his grace and love to the whole world. What had happened? First, they became proud and exclusive and refused God's love. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 29:4. Hearts are hardened by rejected love. With your eyes have seen all that the Lord did in Egypt to Pharaoh... with your own eyes you saw those great trials, those miraculous signs and great wonders. But to this day the Lord has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear. During the 40 years that I led you through the desert, your clothes did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet...I did this so that you might know that I am the Lord your God." He trained them and he protected them and he provided for them. But they did not accept his love as love. So their hearts were hardened. The more he loved them, the harder they became; he hardened them by loving them. They rejected his love and their eyes became blind and their ears dull and their hearts hard. Second, hearts are hardened when God's servant, the man whom God sends is rejected. King David experienced this. Paul quotes Psalm 69:22,23. Verse 20-21 says, 'Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none. They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.' David cursed his enemies; Jesus blessed and forgave his. But Paul sees that to reject the Messiah whom God sent is to invite God's curse on oneself. So the Israelites' hearts were hard because they rejected God's love and because they rejected God's Messiah.

3. The olive tree parable

God is never defeated. He turns adversity into fruitful victory. The olive tree parable shows how God turned the rejection of Israel into riches for the world. He also uses this parable as a warning to the Gentile believers. They must not make the same mistakes which Israel made.

The Patriarchs to whom God's promises were given are the root of the olive tree. The root supports the tree. The natural branches are the Jews. The Jews were cut off from the tree of God's history and the Gentiles, the wild olive shoots, were grafted in. So the failure of Jews became an open door to the Gentile world to come to God.

God did not act arbitrarily toward Israel. The Jews were broken off because of their unbelief and their proud hearts. So the Gentile believers must stand by faith. We began by faith; we must continue by faith. We must not be arrogant, but we must fear God. We are included in God's family by God's grace alone. If the Jews do not persist in their unbelief, they will be grafted in again, for God is able to do it. What a joyful day that would be! Our faith is faith in the promises of God. God longs for the Jews to repent and turn from their pride and hardness and receive the Messiah as their only Savior. They they will surely be grafted in again.

3. The Deliverer from Zion

Isaiah wrote about the Deliverer who would come from Zion. This Deliverer is Jesus. Isaiah 59:20 says, "The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins." God longs for all people to repent and accept his grace of forgiveness and be saved. This is his great redemptive purpose. Israel's hardening opened the door of God's mercy for the Gentiles. They know that they are sinners who don't deserve Jesus' grace--like the Syro-Phoenician woman who said, "But even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall under the table." But God has not given up on the Jews. After the full number of the Gentiles have come in, then the Jews will repent and come to Jesus and again be grafted into the olive tree.

There is no way of salvation except through Jesus, the Deliverer who comes from Zion. As long as the Jews thought they were special people and were confident in their position as Abraham's descendants, their hearts were proud and unrepentant, and they did not come to Jesus. But after tasting the misery and meaninglessness of being cut off from fellowship with God, they could repent and come to the Savior whom God sent. Just as God poured out his mercy on the disobedient Gentile world, so he bound the proud and self-righteous Jews over to disobedience so that they might repent and receive his mercy.

God's ways are inscrutable. We cannot understand him. But we know that his gifts and his call are irrevocable. And we know that he longs to pour out his mercy and forgiveness on all people. He wants all people to realize that the life of disobedience is miserable and meaningless, and he wants all people to come to him for his mercy. Even though we cannot understand the inscrutable ways of God, we worship him. We cannot do anything for him, but he has done everything for us. To him be the glory forever. Amen.