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## *God's Mystery: Israel*

Romans 10

Good morning Chapel Hill. I'm Pastor Bill. If you're new with us today, we have embarked on a year-long study of the Book of Romans. The last two weeks Pastor Mark has addressed the issue of election from Romans 9 and 10. Today we're concluding the three-week mini-series looking at Romans 11 on the future of Israel.

The apostle Paul uses the word "mystery" in Romans 11:25 to describe God's relationship with the people of Israel.

Life is full of mystery, isn't it? Some mysteries come with a small "m" and others are with a capital "M." Two weeks ago I experienced a mystery with a small "m". I was invited a year ago by some close friends in Southern California to perform their daughter's wedding in Homer Alaska – an outdoor wedding no less in the winter! There were blizzard conditions up until one hour before the wedding started and then the skies cleared! Both the bride and the groom are marine biologists and their summer season is incredibly busy so they decided to get married before the summer. They chose to have the wedding outside at a state park that was named in honor of the groom's mother who died when the groom was 9 years old. It had beautiful views of the mountains surrounding Homer and the peninsula. Some of the bride's extended family traveled from Florida to be at the wedding and they were the ones who kept bugging me about keeping the ceremony short! Wimps!

The mystery for me was the date. A few months ago the national team of Celebrate Recovery asked us if we would host a One Day event at Chapel Hill. And they wanted to do it on the same day as the wedding I had committed to do a year ago. No other weekends worked for them.

That was hard for me! I wanted to be at the One Day to participate with our CR Team. As the event got closer I found myself resenting the fact that I would miss the event. I asked the Lord: "God why would you have me miss this most important day of a ministry I'm in charge of?"

God made the "mystery" clear to me when Jenny and I were in Homer. As it turned out it was strategic that I officiated the wedding! We spent four days with the bride's extended family including a 5 and a half hour drive in a stretch limo from Anchorage to Homer in a blizzard! The only believers in this group were the bride's parents, Jenny and me. The rest were primarily non-practicing ex-Catholics, atheists and agnostics! After four days together in close living quarters I am proud to say that most of the family changed their opinion that not all pastors have two heads, and breathe out fire of damnation on everyone they meet!! A couple actually warmed up and shared their personal struggles with their faith in God. That made it worth it!

The apostle Paul in Romans 11 talks to us about a different mystery – a mystery with a Capital "M."

I would like to start by reading Romans 11:25-32

Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,

‘The Deliverer will come from Zion,  
He will banish ungodliness from Jacob’;  
“and this will be my covenant with them  
When I take away their sins.”

As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

Put on your pew belts and listen up because we have a challenging text this morning.

Does God care about the nation of Israel? Paul gives an emphatic yes in Romans 11. Two times Paul leads out with one of his favorite rhetorical devices, the rhetorical question. In Romans 11:1 he asks “Has God rejected his people?” And then again in verse 11 “Did God’s people stumble and fall beyond recovery? Both times Paul answers with a decisive by no means! or of course not!

God loves Israel! They are His chosen people! They are the people of the covenant. In verse 2 Paul says that “God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.” Paul cites the example of his own life as an ethnic Jew who has been saved by grace through faith in Christ. He also uses the example of Elijah who cried out to God that he was all alone in Israel. God said to him, ‘No, you’re not alone, Elijah! I have 7000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.’ You’re not alone.

God always preserved His faithful remnant throughout Israel’s history.

Later on Paul says in verse 14

“I magnify MY ministry...” Why? So he can boast about himself? No. He says “...in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous and thus save some of them.” (slide v14 ESV)

Remember back in Romans 9 Paul said that “his heart was filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief for my people, my Jewish brothers and sisters.” Paul was sad and burdened by the fact that so many of his fellow Jews had hardened their hearts toward Christ. They turned up their noses at the One who offered them “abundant life”.

In verse 11 Paul states that “...through Israel’s “trespass” salvation has come to the Gentiles.”

He uses a vivid agricultural metaphor to explain what is now happening.

Some of the branches of the tree are being “broken off” to make room for new ones. Those broken off represent ungenerated Israel who are not open to God’s message of salvation through faith in Christ in order to make room for us (the Gentiles) whom Paul calls a “wild olive shoot”. We have been “grafted in” among the others and now share in the nourishment from the olive root.

What is the nourishing root of the tree? The root is the Patriarchs of the Old Testament – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the ones God established His covenant with starting back in Genesis 12 beginning with Abraham and continuing on with Isaac and Jacob.

In chapter 11 Paul is speaking to the Gentile believers in Rome. He wants to them to guard against hubris. Some in Roman church were getting haughty that God had chosen them and forgotten Israel! But Paul gives them a stern warning saying that if “God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you.” V 21

Wait a minute! Is Paul saying that the “elect” can lose their salvation?

Our text infers that we cannot presume upon God’s grace and call. If God would prune/harden Israel, his beloved then Gentiles are not exempt.

I told you this is a challenging text! Believers cannot presume upon God’s kindness; we cannot live however we want because we think we are the “elect.” Some of the most sobering words in the New Testament come in Sermon on the Mount when Jesus says,

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.’” Matt 7:21-23

God’s purpose during this season of human history Paul says is to bring Gentiles into God’s kingdom. It’s a “mystery” because at the same time the Gentiles are coming into the kingdom there is a hardening of Israel’s heart toward God. Verse 25 says:

“a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”

Story of Jennifer’s family friends - Leonard and Gaye Garraway ethnic Jews who changed their names after being “born again” in Covelo – became Noah and Gila Garraway. They emigrated to Israel and became Israeli citizens. They felt called as missionaries to the Jews to help them find “Jeshua” their true Messiah. They were not warmly received in Israel as you might imagine. In the small village where they lived officials posted signs about them, warning fellow Israeli’s not to listen to their message. They accused them of using “love” as one of their primary methods of converting people! Such is the state of the heart of many in present day Israel.

In v 26 Paul makes a comment about Israel that the evangelical church has wrestled with for hundreds of years. Paul writes,

“And in this way all Israel will be saved....” V26

What is Paul talking about here? What does he mean when he says that “all Israel” will be saved? There are differences of opinion on this verse within the evangelical community.

The Reformers (Calvin, Zwingli) and some contemporary theologians interpret “all Israel” as referring to the Church. There has always been one way of salvation (faith in God) and one people of God. That means that Old Testament prophecies about “Israel” must find their fulfillment in the Church, for the church is the name of the people of God in the New Testament era. That in turn means that there is little or no room for any real future for Israel as a nation or ethnic group. All people are now on the

same footing; Jews as well as Gentiles can be saved, and on the same basis. Any national privileges for Israel have been revoked.

Another possibility is that "all Israel" refers to "spiritual" Israel, the elect Jews from within national Israel. There is precedent for this meaning of "Israel" in Romans 9:6 which speaks of the "Israel within Israel."

A third perspective on Israel is dispensationalism. Dispensationalism teaches that there is a distinction between Israel and the Church. God still has a distinct future for Israel as an ethnic group. The Old Testament prophecies about Israel must be fulfilled in Israel and Romans 11 teaches that God has a plan for Israel distinct from the Church.

Here's what I think. God is not whimsical. He has not forgotten the promises He made to the Patriarchs in the Old Testament. Paul says in v 29

"...for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable."

If the Jews are not open to the gospel at this time in human history it's for our sake, the sake of the Gentiles. But only for a season...until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Then "all Israel will be saved."

I believe that Paul is saying that there will be a great stirring among the Jews at some point in salvation history. And it makes sense that it will come close to the time of Christ's return.

In Matthew 24 when Jesus talks about the end times he says that

"This gospel of the kingdom must be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." Mt 24:14

Right now there is an unprecedented movement of God's Spirit throughout the world especially in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The gospel is being preached and untold millions are receiving Christ around the world. Half of South Korea has become Christian since the Korean War. China reportedly has hundreds of millions of believers. The same can be said in African and Latin American countries as well. And in last thirty years or so God's Spirit has been moving powerfully among Muslims bringing thousands to Christ through dreams, wars and political upheaval.

Clearly, God's Spirit is on the move world-wide preparing the His people for the Return of the Messiah. I think it's only a matter of time before we witness that same kind of openness to the gospel in Israel. Romans 11 seems to say that it will be so. "God's gifts and call are irrevocable." He has a plan for the elect in Israel.

### **Palm Sunday**

Some of you are thinking, "Ok pastor, so what? Today is Palm Sunday and next week is Easter and I'm looking forward to some homemade berry pie and ice cream after our ham and potato dinner! That's what I'm looking forward to! (Don't think I don't know what you're think'in!)"

Here's why you too should care about Israel:

Jesus cared about Israel.

As Jesus walked into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday Luke says that

“he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace – but now it is hidden from your eyes.’” Luke 19:41

Jesus was articulating these thoughts even as he was entering Jerusalem with his supporters waving palm branches and crying out

“Hosanna, hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Yet a few days later those same “supporters” would be the ones crying out “Crucify Him, Crucify Him” as the Romans and Jews beat and abused Jesus without reason.

Jesus cared about the Jews. He wept over their hardness of heart, just as the apostle Paul wept for his fellow Jews. Jesus cares about “lost” people – Jew or Gentile - just as we should care about lost people.

When was the last time you found yourself sorrowful over a lost person? Have you ever “wept” over someone who didn’t know Christ? Or have you ever wept over a lost people group or a lost generation?

I have found myself “weeping” since the Florida shooting over the spiritual state of the Millennial generation - so few acknowledge Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Those of you who have grown children who are not walking with the Lord know what I’m talking about. Your heart grieves for your child to follow Jesus and not the lies perpetuated by the enemy and this world’s system.

Last week Pastor Mark implored us to “invite someone you know to church on Easter who does not know Christ.” Many of you raised your hand. Have you done that yet? Have you invited your neighbor, your family member, your work colleague to attend Easter with you next week? If not, you still have time to do that.

God wants you and me to have the same attitude that Jesus and Paul possessed toward the Jews and to all people who are apart from Christ. Will you ask God to give you his heart for the lost?