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Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: The Mystery Revealed

Transcribed Message
May 8, 2022
Romans 11:23-27

Turn in your Bible again to Romans. Romans 11. I had actually thought that I might finish out this entire chapter this morning, all 14 verses in one Sunday in light of last Sunday's comment. But then I sensed the Lord was telling me no, Carlon, you need to slow it down. You need to take just one verse a Sunday for the rest of the book of Romans so that this young man's children can come be a part of the study of the book of Romans. If you weren't here last week, I apologize for that, but that was a part of senior Sunday comment. We're going to look this morning at verses 23 to 27. Salvation comes to Israel and Gentiles in the same way through faith in the deliverer of the Lord Jesus, or it doesn't come at all.

Very quick review. You remember the larger context of these chapters that we've been in for a while now. As you work your way through Romans and you get to the end of the 8th chapter, the question that just jumps off of the pages is God, if You are so trustworthy, if Your promises are so certain and sure, how do I know that I can trust You with everything that You've said and especially at the end of that 8th chapter with all of those amazing promises, when I look around and I see Your very chosen people are not responding to the gospel and are not believing. It looks a lot like Your promises to Your people are not being realized and are not being fulfilled. That's the problem and that's the question that Paul's been grappling with in chapters 9, 10, and 11. Paul is answering that number one question in these verses.

In the immediate context, when we go back to where we were a couple of weeks ago in verses 16 through 22, remember Paul did two primary things. First of all, he gave a warning. He gave a warning to the Gentiles. He said to the Gentiles do not become arrogant. Do not become proud. Do not think you are somehow better than the Jewish people because you've believed and they haven't yet believed. Don't give place to arrogance in your heart. Paul added not only that word of warning, but he added a word

of prophecy. That word of prophecy was it can and it will happen to you. It can and it will happen to you, Gentiles. We're seeing that. We will continue to see it as the church, primarily made up of Gentiles, continues to fall away from the faith and to apostatize. We're seeing that today and God's warning and His prophecy is I will begin to cut off the branches of those apostate Gentiles who have turned away from the gospel and turned away from the faith. Then he ended with that strong and somewhat ominous statement when he said behold the kindness and the severity of God. Yes, both are in play.

This morning we look at the fullness of time. As we do that, we want to begin by looking first of all from possible to probable in verses 23 and 24. We begin in verse 23 by noting nothing is impossible with God, "And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again." Look at that verse and you look at those descriptions – they, their, them – are the unbelieving Jews. That is who he is speaking about. What separates unbelieving Jews from salvation? What separates unbelieving Jews from salvation? It is unbelief. It is their failure to believe. The only thing that is keeping them from salvation and stepping into the truth of the gospel is their unbelief. Who can turn unbelief to faith? The only one that can do that is the sovereign God. There is really a kind of a positive statement that he's making here in this double negative. That gives us a little bit of a picture of the hope that is to come and the faith that he is going to talk about that is yet to be kindled within the nation of Israel.

Verse 24. If then, then this. If that, then this. "For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree." Notice how Paul begins verse 24. He begins it with one of his favorite words in the book of Romans. That little word "for". Every time Paul uses that "for", and he uses it a lot. Just go back and look through the study of Romans and circle every "for" at the beginning of a verse. That "for" tells us that Paul is alerting us to the fact that he is going to explain. He is going to explain further what he just said in the verse before. Verse 23. Nothing is impossible with God. God is yet able to do a work in those who have now put themselves in a place of unbelief. For. He steps in to verse 24.

It's also a word of comparison. He's going to argue from the lesser to the greater. The lesser to the greater. God did it for the Gentiles, Paul said. God did it for the Gentiles, and if He did it for the Gentiles, He can and He will certainly do it for the Jews. If I were to paraphrase this, my Carlonian paraphrase would be this. If God can save Gentiles and He can, then He certainly can save Jews. The tree is their tree. The root is their root. The promises are their promises. God can and will graft them back in. When Paul talks about grafting them back in, I want you to notice that what he does here is he uses a verbal form that is called passive. We've heard that before. He's going to graft them back in. It's in the passive voice. The passive, if you remember, is the voice of grace which means God's going to do it. They're not going to graft themselves back in. nobody has the capacity the ability to graft themselves in. It is going to be the work of God. God is going to graft them in. God is the one who's going to bring them to this place of faith. Somebody is going to do it but it's not going to be them on their own. It is going to be the sovereign work of God on behalf of His people.

We've talked about this before. When we encounter statements like this in Romans, it should say to us I will not give up praying for people in my life who need Christ. I will not be dissuaded. I will not be discouraged. I will not stop praying for members of my family. I will not stop praying for friends that I work with. I will not stop praying for neighbors around me. I will not stop praying for friends at school. I will continue because that's what Paul is saying to us here. In what looks like a hopeless situation, there is a glimmer here that is going to be developed in the rest of these verses that says do not forget that we serve the God of the impossible. He turns the hearts of people to Himself. He's the one who grafts them in. he's the one who is going to do it.

We go from that to secondly from probable to certain. From probable to certain. I think you could say that verses 25, 26 and 27, I think you can look at everything that we've studied to this point in Romans 9, 10 and 11 to this point. I think you can take all of what Paul has taught and you can say it's all pointing to these verses. This becomes the climax to this chapter. Now it's good and we're going to get to see in the coming weeks with this amazing doxology, but we're almost at the end of this section. These

verses now at 25, 26 and 27 are really in many ways the climax of all that he's been teaching us in the previous verses. It is from probable to certain.

He begins by telling us there is something that we need to know. There's something we need to know. Look at the beginning of verse 25. "Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers." When Paul uses that phrase, as he does at the beginning of that verse, I don't want you to be unaware, that is a very familiar phrase in Paul's writings. I don't want you to be unaware. In some of your translations it might be, I don't want you to be uninformed. I think the NIV and maybe the King James says that I don't want you to be ignorant. I don't want you to be ignorant about this. There's something here that we need to know. Paul is calling for us to a Biblical literacy. He is calling us to Biblical literacy. If I were to paraphrase that statement, I would say I want you to know the Word of God. I want you to know the Word of God. I don't want you to be ignorant about this. I don't want you to be unaware about this. I don't want you to be uninformed about this.

How are you going to not be ignorant or uninformed or unaware? It is because you read your Bible. It is because you study your Bible. It is because you memorize God's Word. This is the call to Biblical literacy to a church that we know is largely Biblically illiterate. The Word of God is relevant to our day and to our time. My friends, ignorance is not bliss in the Christian life. You will never achieve maturity and godliness in spiritual ignorance. You will never get there if you don't read your Bible. You will never get there if you aren't a part of a small group studying God's Word and encouraging each other together. You're not going to get there if you're unfamiliar with the truth of the Word of God. He's telling us something here that we will not know if we don't do what he tells us we need to do.

I listened to a podcast about a month ago. It was Wayne Grudem, who is a theologian and professor, and Tim Keller. They were talking about an issue in the church today, an issue that's dividing, or at least has been divisive in some respects to the church. It is this matter of the role of women in the church. They were talking specifically about 1 Timothy 2:12. In 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul says I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man. They were talking about that verse and the context and what it does it mean. Keller said something I'd never heard before, but he

said there is a growing sense among younger progressive Christians of what he called Imperial ignorance. He said Imperial ignorance is a position that someone takes when they say I don't know; therefore, you can't know. I don't know what that verse means; therefore, don't tell me you know what it means, because we can't know. These are two distinguished scholars of the Scriptures and they both said we know exactly what that verse means. We just don't like what it means. We know exactly what that verse means but our culture despises what that verse teaches. Therefore, we adopt the position of Imperial ignorance and we say I really don't know what Paul means in that verse, and by the way, you don't know what it means either. Here is a case in point when Paul speaks directly to us and he says I do not countenance spiritual ignorance. I want you to know the truth because it's the truth ultimately that's going to set us free.

In this case, what is it that Paul wants us to know? He wants to know a certain mystery. A mystery is going to be revealed to us. The mystery is going to be revealed. Before we look at the mystery, let's just begin by talking about what is a mystery. That word "mystery" appears 28 times in the New Testament. Twenty of those times Paul speaks about a mystery. Paul is kind of the guy that dominates with this idea of a mystery. It is not something that is difficult or hard to understand. It's not a murder mystery or something they we're trying to figure out. It's not a secret handshake. It's not when you're in a certain group or club or setting where just certain people know a secret. No, it is not that at all. Christian faith is revealed faith. It's a known faith. In the Bible, a mystery is something that was previously concealed but that has now been made known. That's what a mystery is in Scripture. Something previously concealed but now it has been made known. It is made known by revelation. This is something Paul is saying to us that you will not know, you cannot know, you will not discover apart from God's Word. Again, it is just an encouragement to us to say if you really do want to plumb the depths of the Word of God, if you want to know the mysteries that God has revealed, it's not going to come to you by sitting under a tree and thinking all day. It's going to come by revelation and that revelation is given to us with regard to this mystery.

What are some of the mysteries that are revealed? For instance, in the New Testament remember in Matthew 13 Jesus talked about the mysteries of the kingdom.

Jesus talked about what He was doing in teaching by parables. He stepped into the fact that there are mysteries about the kingdom of God that you will not know if I don't tell you those things. There are mysteries with regard to the working of God with the rapture. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul talks about a mystery – the rapture of the church. The mystery of His will in Ephesians 1. Ephesians 3 – the mystery of the church. In Ephesians 5, the mystery of marriage. That is when you don't mess with God-ordained marriage. Why? Because it has to do with an actual mystery that He has revealed about the church being portrayed in a marriage between a man and a woman. In chapter 6, it's the mystery as well of the gospel. The mystery of iniquity. And on the list goes. Here in Romans 11, all of those previously concealed but now we know them by revelation.

In this one, Romans 11, are you ready to step into the mystery? Here we go. The mystery of Israel and the nations. The mystery of Israel and the nations. There are three things about this mystery that Paul says we will not, we could not, we would not know if God did not reveal these things to us. We will simply look at them and scratch our head and say I can't figure out what this is and why this is. The very first thing he tells us is there's been a partial hardening. He tells us then “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.” We look at that and we go okay, here is a part of the mystery being revealed. That mystery tells us that there has been a partial hardening of the Jewish people.

Clearly, we've seen glimpses of this. It reminds us that it is partial, not full. It's not complete. It's not total. It's not everyone. Paul told us it wasn't everyone because he said I'm one of them that has believed. But this, within the plan of God, is the present reality. This exists right now. God in His wisdom, in His sovereignty, has partially blinded the nation of Israel to the gospel. There is a partial blindness. Not every Jew is blinded. There are Jews who come to faith in Christ. But as a national entity, there has been a partial judicial hardening of their hearts. It's the divine discipline of God for their rejection of Jesus the Messiah. A hard truth but that's what Paul is speaking of here. They are spiritually blinded. He said in the previous section there is a stupor over them. Their eyes cannot see. There is a veil over their eyes.

When you and I pick up our Old Testament Bible and we turn to Isaiah 53, we read this absolutely breathtaking account of the coming Messiah and of His coming suffering. we read that 53rd chapter. Every verse of that chapter speaks to us of our Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. In every word, we're gripped by what Isaiah foretold would happen to the Christ. A Jew picks up the Bible and reads Isaiah 53 and you ask a learned rabbi to explain to you Isaiah 53 and they see nothing of that. They don't see their Messiah at all. They're blinded. There is a judicial hardening that God speaks of. Isaiah told us that this would be the case. Verse 9 chapter 6: "Go and say to this people: Keep on hearing but do not understand. keep on seeing but do not perceive. Make the heart of this people dull and their ears heavy and blind their eyes lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn and be healed."

Now look at this partial hardening. There's a second part of this mystery. The second part of this mystery has to do with a mission that is completed. Paul says until. Until. A time word. Until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. so now we know the hardening is partial. It's not every Jew. Now we find out that it is temporary. It is until something. It is until something happens. There are two similar phrases that are used in Scripture. One of them is the times of the Gentiles and another one as we have it here is the fullness of the Gentiles. They are not the same thing. The times of the Gentiles is a prophetic term. It speaks of Gentile domination over the Jewish people that began, the Bible tells us, in 586 with Nebuchadnezzar conquering Judah. From Nebuchadnezzar conquering Judah all the way to this present day and all the way to the second coming of Christ, the Bible speaks of that time period prophetically as the times of the Gentiles. The Gentile nations dominate the world.

Now here he is talking about the fullness of the Gentiles. The fullness of the Gentiles is a soteriological term. It's a term that relates to salvation. It is a term that speaks of what God is going to do with regard to His people in this matter of salvation. Listen to what Peter said, or James in reporting what the apostle had said, in Acts 15. "He said, 'Brothers, listen to me. Simon has related how God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for His name, and with the words of the prophets agree. Just as it is written, after this I will return and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins and I will restore, that the remnant of mankind may seek the

Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name say the Lord who makes these things known from of all.” He's telling us that there is a time period that we're living and it is called the times of the Gentiles. He's telling is the fact that is going to end when the fullness of the Gentiles comes to its completion.

What is the fullness of the Gentiles? Just look at that word “fullness”. It has the idea of a full number, I believe. I believe that God in His sovereign grace has determined those whom He will save. When that number reaches its fullness, when that number is fulfilled, this is going to come to an end. The fullness of the Gentiles will then be complete. That's why we send out missionaries all around the world. That's why we are praying for family and friends and neighbors because we want to see the fullness of the Gentiles brought to completion. We want to see people come to Christ because there's somebody out there or will be that is going to be the last one who is saved within the time and purposes and wisdom of God, and that person is going to bring to a completion the fullness of the Gentiles. That, my friends, is going to mean that Israel's hardening has come to its end and it is removed.

Then look at what Paul reveals. The third part of this mystery. It is partial. It's going to be in place until the mission is completed. Look at the third and final part of this mystery. It is an absolutely amazing promise. All Israel will be saved. Verse 26: “And in this way all Israel will be saved.” Notice the first four words of that verse. In this way. That's telling us that there is a culmination of something. I think visually we can look at it like this. There is Jewish unbelief. There's Jewish unbelief. That Jewish unbelief has led, by the mercies of God, to Gentile salvation. Their unbelief has allowed us to be grafted in so that God in His mercy has used their unbelief to graft in Gentiles to salvation. Then our salvation triggers within the Jewish people and in the nation of Israel a God-ordained jealousy, if you will, and they look ultimately at the Gentile nations and they wonder why are they getting in on all the blessings of God. We want in on that. We want some of that. Gentile salvation stirs a jealousy within them and they come to a point of salvation.

But the point of it all is this. A lot happens between verse 25 and 26 in my understanding of the flow of Scripture. It has to do obviously with eschatology. It has to do with prophecy. It has to do with things that are yet to come. But here's the point and I

think this is the point that we sometimes miss a little bit. We get a little bit out of balance about this. We all like to think about the “when”. We want to know about the “when”. When is Jesus coming back? We want to read the signs. We want to see the sign. We want to be predictive about when we think it will happen, so we really fix on the “when”. I think Jesus told us not to do that, but that’s kind of the tendency of our heart. We’re supposed to look forward to His coming. Every day we’re supposed to look forward to His coming. What we need to do is we need to be more focused on the “what”. On the “what”. The “what” to me between verses 25 and 26 is there is going to be the rapture of the church, the revealing of the antichrist, the beginning of the tribulation and the time of Jacob's trouble. Israel. The time of Jacob's trouble. Then there's going to be an evangelism explosion and the two witnesses and 144,000 Jews who take the gospel to their people are going to see an unprecedented response to the gospel. There are going to be, I believe, millions and millions and millions and millions of Jews who respond to the gospel in faith and believe in this period of time.

When we come back to this passage, we look at that statement again and in this way all Israel will be saved. We have to ask a couple questions. Don't you want to know first of all who is Israel? Who is Israel? That answer depends largely on some of that theology stuff and framework stuff that we talked about in previous weeks. What you bring to Romans 9, 10, and 11 by way of your presuppositions about what you think is going on in these chapters is going to influence largely how you understand that. If you're an amillennialist and don't believe there's a kingdom, a literal kingdom on the earth, our amillennial friends look at that word Israel and say that word is the church. That means all the Gentiles and all the Jews who will be saved. There’s one little tiny problem with that view. Paul uses the word Israel 10 times in chapters 9,10, 11. and if this time he means the church, he pulled a quick one on us there, because every other time he uses the word “Israel”, he clearly means the Jewish people and the ethnic nation of Israel. There is a simply no compelling evidence to suggest that we all of a sudden change the word “Israel” here to mean the church. So we’re going to have to check that one off.

The second possibility is people look at this and say this is referencing the elect Jews. This is talking about the remnant of those who are being saved. The problem with

that is it's redundant. It's like saying the saved can be saved. Of course, the saved are going to be saved. They've been chosen by God to be saved. That misses the point here of the gravity and the greatness of this text. I think what Paul is offering is a far greater vision of the work of God that is yet to come. I think what he is talking about is an awakening that is still in the future. An awakening within ethnic national Israel and a great response and a great turning to the gospel, in contrast to the small remnant that are believing today. We rejoice when we hear a Jewish person comes to faith in Christ. But we all have to confess that we don't hear that very often. It is a remnant of Jews that believe today. But here all Israel is going to be saved.

Now tell me you don't have a question. What's your question now? Who? How many are going to be saved? How many? Okay, so if it is Israel, the Jewish people, the ethnic nation of Israel that is going to respond in this magnanimous way to the gospel, now what am I to understand about this text when it says that all of Israel is going to be saved. Well, not surprisingly, there are differing ideas about this. One of them that is just totally unBiblical is called the Two-Covenant View. The Two-Covenant View says that God has established a covenant relationship with the Jewish people, which we know, we believe, we agree. But in that covenant relationship with them, they are His people whether they believe or trust Christ or not. They're just simply in the covenant by birth. They don't have to believe in Jesus as their Savior. They don't have to look at a Messiah crucified on the cross because after all that is grossly offensive to them. There is a path in the Two-Covenant idea that the Jewish people are saved irrespective of the gospel, irrespective of Christ, and irrespective of the cross, and that simply is not to be believed. God, I believe, is saying to us here that He is going to save all Israel in this sense.

All is almost certainly a hyperbole. It is almost certainly a figure of speech. He is not saying that every single Jew that has ever been born is going to be saved. That is the Two-Covenant theory idea. I believe what he is saying here is there is going to be a vast number. There is going to be a huge number. You might say, wait a minute. You can't do that. All means all. What is our rule of interpretation when reading and studying our Bible? It isn't that we pick a word and do a word study on a word and say this word means this and it means that in every place that it is ever used. No, we can't handle

God's Word that way. You handle God's Word by keeping it in the context in which it is written. I could take you, if we had time, to many places in Scripture where the word "all" doesn't mean all without exception. In Luke 2, when we read that Caesar Augustus issued a decree that all the world should be taxed, are we to believe that every single human being in the world was taxed? No, of course not. All in that case didn't mean all without exception. There are many other places where we see that in Scripture. All here does not mean every single one. It speaks to this vast number, this glorious promise of the future work of God that He is going to do in the hearts and lives of His people.

Now look at this last thing. A look back to the Old Testament. Here is the confirmation in these remaining verses. Paul says "as it is written". He takes us back to Isaiah 59 and Psalm 14, in Jeremiah. He pulls those verses together and he says our Deliverer is coming. "The Deliverer will come from Zion; He will banish ungodliness from Jacob." When I read that our Deliverer is coming, do you know what came to mind? The Rich Mullins song, "My Deliverer is Coming". My Deliverer is standing by. I thought for a moment that I would break out and sing that for you this morning but then I thought better. My Deliverer is coming. My Deliverer is standing by. He is waiting to come. He's coming from Zion and He is coming to Zion. He's coming from the heavenly Zion. He is literally going to come to the earthly Zion, that is Jerusalem. Revelation 1:7. "Behold, He is coming with the clouds and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of Him." Even so. Amen. He's coming.

Now look lastly. Our Deliverer will set us free. Verse 27: "And this will be My covenant with them when I take away their sins." Friends, this is the greatest need of the hour. This is the greatest need of every heart. It is spoken to right here. The provision of God. And this will be My covenant with them when I take away their sins. This isn't only the New Covenant. It is largely the New Covenant but it's the Davidic Covenant as well because the Deliverer promise to David is going to come to the loins of David from Zion, the holy city, Jerusalem. It's also the Abrahamic Covenant. That's why He calls it My covenant. My covenant with My people. But more than that, it is the New Covenant.

Now listen. Just drink in these words in. Jeremiah 31 and verse 31. The Old Testament Scriptures. Listen to what they say: "Behold, the days are coming, declares

the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." What do you say to that? I will set them free. Every one of us born into this world is broken. This sin-wrecked world separated from God. What does God say? I will not abandon them. I will send My Son. I will send a Redeemer. I will send a Deliverer. And He and only He can set them free from their sin. Amazing.

What do we take away? This is a message of hope. This is a message of hope because it reminds us that everything we need comes to us through our great Deliverer Jesus. I close with 1 Peter 1:3 – "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Oh my friend, if you are here this morning and you have never trusted Jesus as your Savior, you are separated from God by your sin and you are without hope in this world because there is nothing that you can do to earn your salvation. There is nothing that you can do to gain eternal life because God demands absolute 100% perfection and that is found only in Jesus, only in His Son. I call upon you this morning to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved and God will give you the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, what amazing words we have seen in Your Word this morning, this message of such hope. Father, I pray that that hope would fill every heart in this room this morning. Father, a heart that came in hopeless and despairing, I pray that You would give them a glorious vision of the future if they but trust You and in

You alone. Holy Spirit of God, open eyes and hearts to this gospel. Encourage us Your people to walk in the light of this truth. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.