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Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: A Remnant Will Be Saved

Transcribed Message
March 13, 2022
Romans 11:1-6

If you were with us last week when we introduced Romans 11, I talked about the fact that in 1948 when through the Balfour Agreement, the nation of Israel was reestablished and given back its homeland in the Middle East. That decision and the repercussions of that really shook the geopolitical world of our time. It was often said that in that day there were people who had their Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other and they were comparing the two as they watched events unfold before them that previous to that no one probably thought would be happening. Well, it wasn't even 20 years later in 1967 that the Arab coalition of nations – Egypt, Jordan, Syria and others – attacked Israel on its most holy day, Yom Kippor. If you remember, in six days the Israeli army overcame an unprecedented number of both Air Force and Army attacks. It is just seen in many respects as God stepping in and having been written about the end times. Lots of books of been written about end time events, about what we call eschatology. It is true that it is still to this day at times that people are reading their Bible and reading the newspaper and comparing different events that they believe are happening in even our day. Romans 11 directs our attention to the nation of Israel and to God's plan and His promise for this people going forward.

This morning in these openings six verses of this 11th chapter we want to see this matter that God is forever a promise keeper. That's who He is. He's a promise keeper. To go back on His word would be to violate His very character. It would be to violate who He is. One thing we can be sure of is that He will never do that.

We're going to start this morning by looking at what the future holds and I want to set this again against the backdrop of Romans 11 and talk about the relevance of Romans 11 with regard to our own day and time. In other words, what difference does it make? What difference does it make to us in 2022 if Israel has a future or if they do not? I would suggest to you that first of all the very fact that it's in the word of God. Here

it is. It's in the word of God. It is in the word and this word can be trusted. God is going to obviously accomplish and fulfill His word at every point. Does it matter whether Israel has a future or not? Is that relevant to us in any respect in this day and time in which we live? The apostle Paul seems to think that it is because he spends three chapters. We've already worked in chapter 9 and 10, and here we are at Chapter 11 where he steps into it in even greater detail. Certainly, in the mind of the apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit directed him to give us this great work. He had that in mind. If God's promises are relevant to Israel, and if they'll be fulfilled in ways that God has promised to Israel, then we can certainly bring that over into our own life and experience. He is trustworthy to us as well. So, it has great relevance.

Secondly, it's a good reminder that the world is not out-of-control no matter what the news cycle might be reporting. I think one of the reasons why the study of prophecy and eschatology and end time events is important is because as we study it we do see God's hand in history. We see that in the past that God made promises and as He through His prophets gave words of prophecy and then we see how those were fulfilled, we see the hand of God. We see God working in the lives of His people and in the lives of nations and individuals. It's very important that we have that same sense of confidence in God with regard to our own future. The caution is if we pick up the newspaper and we pick up our Bible and we start saying these events are it. That's a cautionary thing. We want to be careful that we don't step into that commentary and say we know this is it. We know this is happening. This is the event that the Bible speaks about. The truth of the matter is we don't know that. It's much better if we're reading our Bible and looking at the newspaper and watching the news, it is much better to say this is like that. This could be an indication of what could come rather than saying there's a direct corollary. Obviously, Jesus made clear, as we've said before, nobody knows the day, nobody knows the time. The fact of the matter is since Jesus's ascension almost 2000 years ago, we have technically been living in the end days. That was the beginning of what the Bible talks about as the end times when Jesus ascended to the Father.

I think the third thing that helps us here is that it gives us a Biblical perspective of how it is that we should view Israel. As we step into this 11th chapter, a chapter filled

with Paul's understanding of what God is going to yet do in the life of this nation, this gives us a Biblical perspective as well. One of the things that we should realize is it's not Israel right or wrong. It's not Israel right or wrong, any more than it's America right or wrong. We don't tie ourselves to a government. We don't tie ourselves to an ideology. Israel is back in the land, but they're back in the land in unbelief. They're not a people who are walking with God and pursuing God. We believe that day will yet come, but that's not what's happening today. As Israel relates to its neighbors and as it relates to other nations around it, then it too is called to accountability before God. Its actions are to be just and right as well. Then on the other side of that spectrum. it's never right to have an attitude of anti-Semitism. We don't have the attitude whatever Israel does is okay because they're the people of God. That is not God's perspective, but it is certainly wrong to go to the other end of the spectrum and have an attitude of hostility or prejudice against Jewish people or the nation of Israel simply because they're Jewish people. We've seen that all through history.

Paul is going to make clear in this 11th chapter, and we really spoke about it last Sunday, that as Gentiles, who most of us are, we step into incredible blessing because of the Jewish people. The very Bible we're reading and studying this morning comes to us because of the Jewish people. Our very Savior comes to us through the Jewish lineage. The promises of God come to us through the Jewish people. We have a great deal to be thankful for with regard to the gospel and our own salvation as it relates to God's chosen people.

Let's look this morning at God's relationship to Israel, and in our previous outline we noted that this really includes the first 10 verses. We're going to look at the first six verses this morning and then we're going to hope Jesus comes back before next Sunday because verses 7 through 10 can be kind of challenging. But even if Jesus doesn't come back, we will, Lord willing, be here to try our best. Let's look at this matter of God's relationship to Israel as Paul gives it to us in these opening six verses. It's good for us to as we read our Scripture to step back in to chapter 10. Let's take a quick look back to chapter 10 and I mentioned last Sunday this is kind of a not very helpful chapter break because chapter 10 verse 21 just flows right into chapter 11 verse 1. Look at that 21st verse: "But of Israel He says (that is God), 'All day long I have held out

my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.” This statement that we read here, this description of the people of God as being disobedient and being obstinate, Paul had said earlier they had heard the gospel. They had understood that it was a message of grace because they rejected it so strongly in favor of self-righteousness. He also spoke of the fact that they resisted this message. That really is the backdrop of this.

Then the question that comes out of that: if these people are so disobedient and are so obstinate, if they are rejecting all of God’s overtures toward them, then what’s the most natural question that arises out of that context? God, have You rejected them since they’ve rejected You? some people answer that question, as we talked about last Sunday, with an unqualified yes. Their understanding of the framework of Scripture and the storyline of the Bible is that God’s dealings with Israel ended and now He’s picked that up in the church and there isn’t a future for the nation of Israel. I believe it’s a qualified yes. Has God rejected His people? In a sense, it’s a qualified yes because we qualify it by saying yes, He has, but only temporarily and only partially. I think that’s what Paul does in these opening verses. Let’s look at that.

How do we know that God’s rejection of the Jewish people and of the nation of Israel is only partial? How do we know it’s only temporary, that there is yet the future that they will enjoy? Paul is going to give us five reasons. The first one: because God gives an emphatic no. Beginning of verse 1: “I ask, then, has God rejected His people? By no means!” This is the ninth rhetorical question that Paul asks in the book of Romans. A rhetorical question is a question that you ask and you fully expect that the answer back to your question is going to be no. When Bonnie asks me, “You’re not going to wear that, are you?” And I say, “No, I was just going to the garage to make sure the car is still there before I leave. I’m going back to change right now as a matter of fact.” That’s a rhetorical question. We know full well when somebody frames a question like that that they already are expecting the answer back. That’s what Paul does here. He frames this question so that there isn’t any doubt as to what he expects the answer is going to be.

To help us even more, he makes it very clear that this emphatic no is stated as we’ve seen many times with this word *me genoita* which is the most emphatic expression of the Greek language. It’s hard to miss how strong Paul is answering this

question. Is God through with His people? May it never be! Perish the thought! A thousand times no! We've seen this many times over. The word "rejected" here. I ask, has God rejected His people? That word "rejected" means to cast aside. The idea is to throw away, to abandon. That's the imagery that we have here. You get the sense of the passion of Paul in asking this rhetorical question and fully expecting the answer to be no because look at that statement again in verse 1. As you look at that, I want you to underline in that statement – I ask, then, has God rejected His people? – if you were right now to take your pen and underline a word in that sentence, what word would you underline? Has God rejected His people? The word would be ... His. Paul wants us to see how deeply he feels about this, not only in this negation, not only in this rhetorical question, but in the way that he addresses it with regard to His people. He didn't say just the Jews. He could have framed it and said has God rejected Israel? Has God rejected the Jewish people? No, he didn't. He says has God rejected His people. Emphatically, the answer is no. Right out of the gate you get a strong word of assurance that being the people of God is to be in a place that is special.

I know that many within the Christian community struggle with the assurance of salvation for a whole variety of reasons. Some of you were taught you can't have assurance of salvation. That's one of the things that continues to linger in your mind. You can't really know that for sure, can you? just look at this statement here and its application to us. We're the people of God by faith in Christ. You can easily just put yourself in that verse, in that statement. Is there any way that God would reject you as His child? The answer would be an emphatic no. It would be a rhetorical question.

Paul, do you have the proof of this beyond that opening statement? Paul says, let me go to point number two. I say this so emphatically secondly, because of my own story. Because of Paul's own story. Look at the end of that 1st verse: "For I myself am an Israelite, a descendent of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin." Yes, he says. Yes, I can give you tangible proof of the answer to this question and why I said it so emphatically. and the proof is me, Paul says. The proof is me. I'm an example of the remnant. I'm why you can't give an unqualified yes to this matter of has God rejected His people because I'm before you as living proof that He has not done that because I

myself am counted in this number. What you find in Paul's life is this example of this most unlikely convert. He's the most unlikely convert.

Actually, when I wrote that phrase out, it immediately brought to my Rosemary Butterfield's book *The Story of an Unlikely Convert*. For those of you not familiar with Rosaria Butterfield's story, she was a professor at a liberal arts university on the East Coast. She was an avowed lesbian. She was the department head of women's and feminist studies at the university. She was in a lesbian relationship. God in His divine providence allowed her life and the life of a pastor and his wife in that same city to intersect. Through a series of continuing conversations and acts of love and kindness, Rosaria Butterfield, a most unlikely convert, a woman who literally went around the United States teaching seminars, encouraging the LGBTQ agenda and lifestyle, and feminism, miraculously came to faith in Christ. Her life was completely changed. She's today married to a Presbyterian pastor who homeschools her children. It is an amazing, amazing story. Well, much more so the apostle Paul because he goes from being the persecutor of the church to the proclaimer of the gospel. Nobody would've ever thought this would have happened. Paul was living proof of the power of the gospel.

I know that before me this morning there are those of you that if you would go back to your high school or your college or back to your young adult days and say to your friends, do you know that I'm in church every Sunday and we're studying through the book of Romans ... and I'm in a small group ... and I'm involved in ministry in the life of my church. They would be shocked. That wasn't who you were. That didn't look like the path that you were going to be on. And yet here you are today, and you're testifying to the gospel of grace and the power of that gospel to change a life. That's what Paul is doing here. He is making this point. If that's not you, then maybe you're praying for somebody like that. Maybe you're praying for an unlikely convert in your family or within your circle of friends. I think this is great encouragement every time we come to this and these kinds of stories in the Bible of how God breaks into the most unlikely circumstances and does things that only He can do.

Now notice that he wants us to focus on his ethnicity. That's the point that he's making here. He lifts out for us this trifecta. Paul testifies to the fact that he's a Jew, but he's a Christian. He is a Jew and he's a Christian. He says that he is an Israelite. He is

Hebrew in his ethnicity. He is of a descendent of Abraham. He takes us right back to the first Gentile who God converted to be the first Jew, and called out of Abraham the nation of Israel. Furthermore, he's of the tribe of Benjamin. Who cares about that? A lot of people cared about that. Paul does the same thing in Philippians 3:5 when he talked about his lineage, his heritage, his credentials. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He mentions again there he was of the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin was one of only two of the tribes that stayed faithful to God in the midst of apostasy. The tribe of Benjamin included the geography of the city of Jerusalem. When he said I'm of the tribe of Benjamin, it clicked in the minds of Jewish people. It's almost as if Paul is saying to those who are reading this I am a Jew's Jew. I am an Israelite. I am of Abraham. I'm of the tribe of Benjamin. This is the point that Paul is making. This is the argument that he is making. God has not abandoned His people. If God has saved one Jew, and He has, then I'm that man, Paul says.

Now notice the point number three. Because of God's foreknowledge. Because of God's foreknowledge. The very first statement of verse 2: "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew." If his previous argument was this emphatic no, and then the second one was personal. It's my story. I'm the guy. Then this reason, I would suggest, is kind of along the lines of one that is doctrinal. It is theological in nature when he tells us here that it is based on the foreknowledge of God. Verse 2, the very first part, underscores the absolute omniscience of God. But don't stop there. Because it's much more than that. It's not just the foreknowledge of God that sees something that is to come. It is much more than that. Of course, foreknowledge speaks of God's omniscience, the fact that God knows all things. He knows all things simultaneously. He knows all things perfectly. He knows everything that has happened. He knows everything that is happening. He knows everything that is going to happen. You know what? He knows everything that could happen. He knows everything. So, in this word there is that understanding that God is who He is based on His very character of being all-knowing.

It also means that God is not the least bit surprised when His people abandoned Him. Somebody might well have stepped in to this story and said God, it would be perfectly okay for You to go to Plan B because Plan A obviously didn't work. Maybe You

didn't see it coming. Maybe You were surprised that they turned away from You after all the blessings that You extended to them. Of course not. He knew exactly what was going to happen. He knew exactly what was going to happen. He knew exactly what was going to happen hundreds of years after He chose Abraham to be the beginning of this chosen people. He knew full well what their history was going to involve based upon His omniscience and His foreknowledge.

God knows the same thing about us. Isn't that interesting? Sometimes as we struggle even as I just mentioned about assurance and security, isn't that struggle in part based on a misunderstanding of what it is that God knew when He was getting us? Did we think for a moment that God thought He was getting a great prize when He got us? And then He was surprised that we didn't turn out to be the great prize? Of course not. He knew everything about us when He called us, when He chose us, when He set His love upon us. He knew all of that. He knew you'd be sitting here this morning listening to Romans 11 being taught. He knows right where you are right now spiritually in your journey, either as a pre-Christian, or as a believer, or as a believer who has lost their way. He knows all of that. He's saying that to us here in this context about the heart of God for His people.

But this is what I want you to see. This matter of foreknowledge is much more than just God knowing in advance. Of course, God knows in advance. That's who He is. But we have said repeatedly that the Biblical understanding of the word foreknowledge is much more than knowing something ahead of time. It is a word that speaks of foreloving somebody. It is a word that speaks of a relationship, of development with somebody. When he speaks about this matter of God foreknowing, it's speaking of the fact that He has set His love upon us. It's reflected in Amos chapter 3 and verse 2 when God says to the nation of Israel, you only of all the nations of the earth I have known. You only have I known. Really, God? You didn't know about all those other nations? Of course, He knew about all of those other nations. That is understood. What is being communicated in the word foreknowledge is not just God knows something ahead of time. You as the people of God, the nation of Israel, you only have I known in the sense that I have chosen you. I have called you into this special relationship. Those whom God has foreknown He cannot and He will not reject. Those whom God has foreknown

He cannot and He will not reject. He has committed himself to them. He has committed Himself to you.

The other thing that we have to decide in the light of that is who exactly is in view? There are a couple of options. I think it is the nation of Israel broadly speaking here that has been chosen by God. It is not at this point in Romans 11 individual election and foreknowledge that is in view. That's to state the obvious. How is it that you could be chosen of God and then at the same time be rejected by God? That's not what he's saying here. I think what he's talking about here is it is a national foreknowledge. It is God having chosen the nation of Israel and His people. That doesn't mean, as he's already said, that all Jews are going to be saved. He made that abundantly clear in chapter 9. Jacob have I loved and Esau I have hated. To say that God has chosen the nation of Israel, that He has foreknown the nation of Israel in this broader statement is not to say that this is now something of a statement of what God's going to do in saving all of them. No, it is rather that his argument is that God is not finished with the nation. Why? Because He has chosen them. They are His people in this broad sense of the word. They are disobedient. They're obstinate. But they remain in God's sovereignty, His chosen nation. I believe as I'm reading my Bible today that this statement that I have foreknown you as the people of God in its application to Israel is just that. God still has a chosen people. The nation of Israel. He will not reject them. He will not turn from them. They are His people in whom He is yet going to do a great and mighty work.

Reason number one. A very emphatic, rhetorical question. No. No way. Reason number two. Personal argument. Look at me, Paul says. Reason number three. This theological argument. Reason number four we're going to call the Biblical argument. It really is because of Elijah's experience. He points to Elijah's experience. Look at verse 2. "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew." The nation of Israel is still God's chosen people. "Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? 'Lord, they have killed Your prophets, they have demolished Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.' But what is God's reply to him? 'I have kept for Myself 7000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.'"

Once again, as Paul has done numerous times in Romans, what does he do? He takes us back to the Old Testament. He takes us back to the life of Elijah. First Kings

chapter 17, 18 and 19. This amazing story of the life of Elijah. It is a time of national crisis. In this Biblical example that Paul is recalling from, he takes us back in Israel's history and it is a time of national crisis. Apostasy is rampant. You remember that idolatry is pervasive throughout the northern 10 tribes. They have given themselves wholeheartedly over to idols, turned away from the living God. and you remember the story of Elijah stepping into that circumstance and challenging the priests of Baal to a contest. Who is going to be able to bring down fire and rain from heaven? It was a little bit unfair because Baal was the god of the storm. Baal was the god of lightning. Baal was the god of rain and thunder. It is almost like Elijah yielded the home-court advantage to Baal. He is going to make it easy because that's who he is. They have this contest and it plays out, as you know, Jehovah prevails. At the end of that contest, Elijah indicates that all of the priests of Baal are to be sought after and killed. That's what happens. Then what happens after this great incredible display of the power of God and the overcoming of evil and darkness? What happens after this great victory? Where do we find Elijah? We find him discouraged and depressed and afraid and running for his life because Queen Jezebel said she's going to kill him now. That's where we find this story unfolding.

Elijah is sometimes us, right? He is sometimes us. This combination of fear, discouragement, mix in a little pride, and an element of self-pity. We look around and Elijah concludes God, it is just me. I'm the only one. I'm the only one that is faithful to You. I'm the only one that is left. It is pretty easy at times to feel that way. Here we are. We're a little remnant in the midst of a culture that seems hell-bent to get as far away as they possibly can from the principles of Scripture and from the God who created them.

There's a new law in Florida, the Parent Protection Law. The Parent Protection Law is a law that states that preschool children (four or five-year-olds) to age 8 should not be taught in public schools by teachers or other professionals about gender identity and sexual orientation. That's what the law says. That law is being vilified and being misrepresented and being made to seem as if it's the worst thing that could ever happen to children aged 4 through 8 to the extent that it is a hate law now. You get reminders of that way too often in our culture. We're called upon as the people of God to do what? We can spend all of our time, as Dr. Hendricks used to say, cursing the darkness or we

can press into and pursue and find a way to be light. Just like Rosario Butterfield experienced. Here is an example to us of our own current day, a day of gross apostasy.

God says Elijah, what you've forgotten is it really is all about Me. It really is all about Me. It's not all about you, Elijah. You're really not at the center of this universe. I am. It is all about God. God comes back to him in verse 4 and in effect basically says Elijah, would you stop whining. Just get your eyes off of yourself. Get some rest. Here is some nourishment. Refresh yourself. Refocus. Look at verse 4: "But what is God's reply to him? 'I have kept for Myself 7000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.'" Here we go again. In that little phrase, I want you to circle or underline. In the phrase "I have kept for myself", what word are you underlining and circling? I went with "I". I have kept for Myself. A sovereign, gracious God is choosing to keep a remnant of godly people for Himself. May we be that remnant! May we be that people! That's God calling on us today. In the midst of a dark and perverse generation, Paul says in Philippians 2, among whom you shine as lights in this world. That's to be us. The point that is being driven home here is God is the one who's going to do it. God is saying to us in our culture, in our day, in our time, I've got this and I've got you. Just be faithful in walking with Me. Don't be so preoccupied with all of the other and forget to stay focused on Me because I have kept for Myself.

There's one more reason and it is in verses 5 and 6. Because of the grace of God. Because of the grace of God. "So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace." Just look how the emphasis of this verse brings before us that it is God's choice. Again, God is front and center. It is God's choice, not theirs. In these last two verses, Paul is telling us what it is that God has done, what it is that God is doing. It is literally in that 5th verse: "So too at the present time there is a remnant..." Literally in the Greek, it says election by grace. It is not actually the word for chosen. It's election by grace. It is God's work. It is God's doing. Salvation is a work of God.

And just so we don't miss it, look what he does in verse 6. He underscores the nature of grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace." He mentions grace three more times in verse 6. You come to this marvelous salvation because of the grace of God. You're kept in this marvelous salvation because of the grace of God. That is what he is underscoring. He

yields no ground. It's either grace or it's works. It's either works or it's grace. He doesn't give us any other option. The basis on which God deals with His people is grace. That's why I believe Israel has a future because of the grace of God. That's why I believe you and I have a glorious future. It is because of the grace of God. We can be sure that our promise-keeping God will do what He has said that He will do because He's a promise keeper and to do anything less than keeping His promises would be to violate His own character, and that He will not do.

What do we take away? My friends, God is at work. God is at work. God is at work in our world. God is at work in your life. God is at work in your family. God is at work at Covenant. God is at work. I think the caution to us is that we don't preoccupy ourselves just with what we can see. Don't evaluate what God is doing simply on the basis of what you can see with your eyes and limit what God is doing based on that. God is always doing way more than we can see. He's always doing way more than we know. To pull back the curtain and to see the hand of God and the providence of God at work in our life is to see a God who is constantly accomplishing and doing His will and purposes in our lives. With that, I just note don't underestimate your own story. Don't underestimate the grace of God that is at work in your life. When we make ourselves available to God, God has promised that whether we see it or not, He is at work and He is accomplishing and doing His will.

The offer of salvation through Jesus Christ is extended to all, but you must come by faith in Christ alone based on the grace of God alone to receive this gift of eternal life. You can't mix in a little bit of your good works. You can't mix in a little bit of your human effort. You can't bring anything to God other than your sinfulness, your brokenness, and your fallenness. Then, to receive from the hand of this gracious God the forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we are always in awe of what You are doing. Lord, sometimes we see it and it's amazing and we're thankful, and sometimes we don't see it, but God, You're still at work. You're still accomplishing Your will. You're still doing all that You have promised. Give us eyes of faith to believe that, to see that. Father God, I pray right now in these closing moments that Your Spirit would give understanding, that this salvation that You offer us through Jesus Your Son comes not on the basis of

anything that we can do or anything that we can bring. It is simply by Your grace and by Your grace alone. When we acknowledge before You that we have sinned and fallen short of Your glory, and when we acknowledge that Jesus has done everything that needs to be done on the cross, and we say to You I believe, You give to us the gift of eternal life, and for that we are forever thankful, father. In Jesus's name, amen.