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Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: life From the Dead

Transcribed Message
April 3, 2022
Romans 11:11-15

In 1988, Bonnie and I and our family were living in a community about 30 miles north of Wichita in Kansas. Our church was actually out in the country. It was kind of situated between three communities and people came from these various communities to our church. I don't remember how it happened, but somewhere along the way a church in Manhattan, Kansas got in touch with us and asked us to consider moving to Manhattan and being a pastor on their staff. While we were very happy where we were, we sensed that God was saying just trust Me in this and walk through the doors that are open. If I don't want you there, I'll close those doors. So, we did that. Many hours of conversation later and a visit to Manhattan, shortly thereafter I got a phone call from the chair of the search committee. He said that we're no longer interested in you coming to join our church and to be our pastor. That was the sound of the door closing. About two years later, a fellow named Mike Fisher called and asked us to consider the same thing. Again, we told the Lord we'll just walk through as many doors as You open and we'll trust You to lead us in that way. Of course, as they say, the rest is history.

That's what God often does, doesn't He? He often is about the business of closing one door only to open another door. He always does it according to His sovereign purposes and For his glory. That is what we see in this amazing passage in Romans 11 this morning. These are some incredibly insightful verses about what God is doing in our world and what He is going to be doing. We're going to begin as we always do. We're going to begin with a review of some of the things that we've looked at.

It starts off once again with this interacting over this very crucial question. It is a big question that's dominating especially the 11th chapter and the question is: Is God through with Israel? Is God through with the Jewish people as a national entity? Some would suggest, and I would agree with them, that your framework for understanding the Bible, your theology if you will, how you see the storyline of the Bible developing is

really going to influence greatly how you answer that question. In general, there are two different ways that we can come to this 11th chapter of Romans. Two different approaches. I'm going to paint with a very broad brush in doing this.

The first, as we said a few weeks ago, was called Covenant theology, sometimes called Reformed theology. With that word, you remember is the word amillennialism. The "a" is a negation of the word millennium. So, there is no millennium. Israel failed to fulfill God's plan, to obey God, to walk in obedience before God, and the church steps in and takes that place. Or as they would rather say, fulfills those promises that God had originally made to Israel. In this understanding of the framework of the Bible, the church is going to finish out what Israel started. Israel is going to fulfill God's plan with regard to the future so that going forward there is no specific plan of God with regard to the ethnic people of Israel as a Jewish nation.

The second way of looking at the storyline and the framework of the Bible falls within what is called Dispensational theology, or something that is within that framework. The word pre-millennial is often connected with this particular view. Pre- means before. Before the millennium. Jesus is going to return before the millennium. In fact, Jesus's return will usher in a literal millennial reign of Christ on the earth. One of the distinguishing features of this particular perspective of premillennialism is that Israel in the Bible means Israel. The word "church" in the Bible means church. They are not interchangeable at some point. They are two different entities and God has a plan for both of them. The word "Israel" is used some 70 times in the New Testament and I would suggest that about 68 of those times there is absolutely very little discussion as to what it is referring to. It is referring to the Jewish people, the ethnic people, the nation of Israel. This is why when you answer this question – Is God through with the nation of Israel? Is God through with the Jews? – with regard to the future and what His plan and purpose is, how you understand the framework of the Bible and how you see this particular issue is going to help you answer that question.

Charles Spurgeon, who has been called the prince of preachers, has given us literally thousands of sermons. He is very silent about Romans 11. Alexander McLaren, another great expositor of the word of God. In his Romans commentary when you come to chapters 9,10, and 11, he says nothing about the chapters. That is not because they

weren't brilliant men or incredible expositors. It is that by their own admission they struggle to understand what this is all about with regard to Israel and its future and its relationship to the church.

Here's what we want to do. I want to just remind you again of two truths that Paul underscores in this 11th chapter. Two truths that Paul underscores. It really helps us to divide the chapter into two parts. We've already looked at the first part. In verses 1 through 10 we determined that Israel's failure is partial. It is not total. Israel's failure is partial, but not total. That's why when Paul says in verse 1: "I ask then, has God rejected His people? By no means! For I myself am in Israelite." We know that at least in part the answer to the question is God finished with Israel Paul himself says no. He says no based on his own personal testimony. He is a Jew and he's come to faith in Christ. Then remember, he added a doctrinal reason, and he added a biblical reason, and he added a practical reason. Now when we get into this next set of verses, I would suggest that he adds an eschatological reason. A reason that has to do with the future, the end times, what is yet to come. That's what the second half of this chapter dives into. So, firstly, Israel's failure is partial. It's not total.

Secondly, Israel's failure is temporary. It's not permanent. That's what we see in verses 11 to 24 which we'll start on this morning. I believe what Paul points us to in these verses is nothing less than the greatest revival that the world will ever see. I believe that yet coming in the future, during what is called the Great Tribulation and the witness of the 144,000 Jews who go out to all the world, that God is going to do something that is unprecedented. I believe there are going to be millions and millions of people who come to faith in Christ during that amazing time. Paul's point in this 11th chapter is Israel's failure is partial, not total. Israel's failure is simply temporary. It's not permanent. He's going to give us an amazing insight into what that looks like.

Let's look at one door closed and another opened. I want to begin by just putting before you what I think is foundational to this whole chapter and especially the verses we look at this morning. A foundational truth to remember and that foundational truth is very simply stated as God is sovereign over all the details of life. God is sovereign over all the details of life. When you think of the sovereignty of God, you think of the fact that God is king. God is ruler over all. It takes us to Psalm 115 and 15 verse 3: "Our God is

in the heavens; He does all He pleases.” I can't think of a more succinct statement of Scripture with regard to the sovereignty of God. Our God is in the heavens; He does all that He pleases. That's the sovereignty of God. That is the work of God in our world and in our lives.

But sovereignty does not mean the approval of everything. Sovereignty does not mean the approval of everything. Clearly there are a lot of things happening in our world that God does not approve of. From my vantage point, it looks like that list is growing by the day. Who would've thought five years ago that a candidate to sit on the Supreme Court of the United States of America could not answer the question what is a woman? Who would've thought that? I don't think it's because she doesn't know the answer. I think it's because she didn't feel like she could answer it. But that's where we are. In Genesis 1, when God says that He created man in His own image, in His own likeness, and made them male and female, He gave us everything we needed to know about what He has done in creating humanity. He made them male and He made them female. I would suggest that what we're seeing all across our land, all across the world today is Romans chapter 1. The chapter we started this whole series in. God gave them over. That's more of what witnessing every day. When we think of the sovereignty of God, it absolutely means that our God is in the heavens and He does all that He pleases. It does not mean that He condones everything that's going on in our world.

But here's the other part of that. Sovereignty does mean that God is able to control all of the things, all of the events, so that the results still bring Him glory. That's what it does mean. Somehow, in the midst of everything that's going on in our world, God is exercising His providential control over all of the details of our lives and even in the missteps and the failings and the sin. Yes, the sin. God is still able to orchestrate and to carry out His will in such a way that He brings His glory to the forefront. So, I ask you this question: Can God use sin to accomplish His purposes? Can God use sin to accomplish His purpose? That answer should be a very emphatic yes actually. Of course, He can. The greatest example of the Old Testament is probably the life of Joseph. At every step along the way, Joseph's brothers opposed the will of God for Joseph's life. And every step along the way, God in His providence intervened, and at the end of it, Joseph could stand before them and say you meant everything that you

did to me for evil. God in His sovereignty was able to take every one of those things and use them for good in my life. You get to the New Testament and the greatest example is at the cross. It is underscored in the statement that Paul makes with regard to the sinfulness of man taking the Lord of glory and crucifying Him on the cross. God is so wise. God is so incomprehensible. God is so infinite that in His ways He is able to use even unbelief to bring about salvation. That's what we look at. That is the thesis of these verses this morning. God is so wise. He is so incomprehensible. He is so infinite that He could actually even take the unbelief of people and turn it into salvation.

Let's look. Three amazing blessings that come forward in these verses this morning that only God can accomplish, that only God can bring about. The first blessing. This one really is the foundation of these verses and everything else that follows it just builds upon it. This first blessing is the blessing of divine salvation. The blessing of divine salvation. Let's look at this 11th verse: "So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous." The first blessing is this idea of divine salvation. This is an amazing verse. The truth of this verse is absolutely a living illustration of what we just talked about in terms of the sovereignty of God. I want you to see three things out of verse 11.

First, Israel's fall is neither fatal nor final. Israel's fall is neither fatal nor final. "So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall?" If my count is right, this is the 10th time that Paul uses a rhetorical question in the book of Romans. We're very familiar with what he does when he asked these questions. This question, just the way Paul has worded this question, demands a "no" answer. Really what you have is this big question, this crucial question that is all about Chapter 11. Is God through with Israel? Is God finished with the nation? Paul in this 10th rhetorical question gives us two ways to answer that.

First of all, it is just by the way he has constructed the sentence. As a reader of the Greek text or a listener in the 1st century would've heard this question, they would've known immediately that what Paul wanted them to say was no. just the way he worded the question, the answer is no before he even says another word. But the second thing that Paul does, it is almost like I know you know the answer is no, but just in case you

missed it, somehow I want to say again the answer is no. That's what he does. He adds the strongest negation in the Greek language and I wonder if anybody knows what that word could possibly be. *Me genoita*. This is the disappointing thing, my friends. This is the last time we see *me genoita* in Romans. Hopefully you have by now got that word tucked away in your vocabulary. So dad, when your daughter comes to you and says I am almost 14. Can I go on a date with Johnny? And you can say *me genoita*! When your son who has just turned 16 and gets his driver's license: Dad, can I take your new truck and go out with some of my friends tonight? *Me genoita*. Honey, you're not wearing that to church today, are you? *Me genoita*! I'm going back to change. This is the point that Paul is making as strong as he can say it. He wants us to understand and hear.

Now, look what he doesn't say. You notice that he doesn't say that Israel didn't stumble. In fact, he says that they did. Remember back in chapter 9 verse 32. "Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone." They did stumble, but they didn't fall. The contrast here between stumble and fall is yes, they stumbled. But they didn't stumble and fall in such a way that they couldn't get up. Everybody has stumbled and sometimes when we stumble we don't fall. But sometimes when we stumble we go ahead and fall. Some of your translations, the ESV doesn't do this, but I think the NIV actually says that they don't stumble in such a way that they don't recover. They think they fall in such a way that they don't get up. That is the contrast that Paul is giving us here. They stumble; yes, but they don't fall in such a way that they can't get up. it seems to me if there was ever a time for God to say to His people this is enough, it would've been right here. Did they stumble? Absolutely, they stumbled. They stumbled in a monumental way. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, very God of very God, and very man of very man walks among His own and His own received Him not. They literally see Him doing the works of God in the power of the Holy Spirit and they attribute those works to Satan himself. Did they stumble? Absolutely they stumbled. They stumbled in a monumental way in that they crucified the Lord of glory. And yet, God in His sovereign grace says they stumbled; yes, but they didn't stumble so as to fall and not get up. Verse 2 of this 11th chapter. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. That's the point. they

stumbled; yes, they stumbled. but they didn't stumble so as to fall in a way that was irrecoverable.

Note the second thing that Paul says. What you might expect and what really is. The next little phrase of this 11th verse is introduced with the word “rather” in the English Standard Version. It’s just a little Greek word *de*. A lot of times it’s just translated with the adversative “but”. “So I ask you, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! But (or rather) through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles.” So, there’s a contrast that he wants us to see now. The contrast that he wants us to see is the contrast between what we might expect and what really is. Between what we might expect to read next and what really happens. We expect possibly that God’s plan has been derailed, that God’s plan has been ruined. But remember our first point. God is sovereign and the difference between what we expect could happen and what really is happening, and what is going to happen is nothing less than the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. While Israel stumbled, they did not stumble in such a way that it took God by surprise, that He never anticipated that this was a possibility, that now He’s not sure what the next part of this plan is.

The book of Acts brings this clearly to light. I’m just going to read a number of these passages so that you see this unfold. Acts chapter 13 and verse 44: “The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, ‘It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we’re turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.”

Drop down to the 14th chapter and the opening verses there. “Now in Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and they spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned in their minds against the brothers. So they remained for a

long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who bore witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.”

And then this one last one. There is more there, but go to the end of Acts to the 28th chapter and verse 23: “When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying of the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: ‘The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: Go to this people, and say, you will indeed hear but never understand, you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed.’” See what's happening? What we might have expected and what really is happening. That's the contrast that Paul is drawing here.

Notice the last thing of this 11th verse. There is an unusual purpose for all of this in mind. There's an unusual purpose. The end of this 11th verse Paul says so as to make Israel jealous. Very unusual statement. God is doing all of this, he says, so as to make Israel jealous. Now that may rightly be said to sound unusual, but it's not unexpected. Why is it not unexpected? Because God had said through Moses that this is exactly what was going to happen. When Moses finished one of his last speeches to the children of Israel in Deuteronomy chapter 32 and in verse 21, this is what Moses says, “They have made Me jealous with what is no god. They have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with those who are no people. I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.” Who are the “no people”? who is the foolish nation? It's Gentiles. Deuteronomy 32. Moses, in some of his last words to the nation, predicts that what we're studying in Romans 11 would be happening, that his people would stumble but they would not fatally fall. To be told that God has in essence set you aside. That's hard. To be told that God has set you aside is a hard thing to hear. To be told that God has set you aside and He has put in your place Gentiles, that's outrageous. That's outrageous to the Jewish mind. That God would in His sovereign

purposes turn from His people, and in their place for a time put the Gentiles. That was outrageous to the Jewish mind.

Even today, ministries that are particularly focused on the nation of Israel and Jewish people face greater hostility than most other ministries. Jews for Jesus. Chosen People. Israel My Glory. These kinds of ministries that are attempting to take the gospel to Jewish people all around the world and within Israel are subject to great hostility from the Jewish authorities. Even within Israel there are laws about proselytizing. If you were to listen in to a conversation between a Jew and Christian, it might go something like this. The Jew might say to his Christian friend: "Yours is a false religion. You have a false religion because you're worshiping a man. Jesus was not God. Jesus was not Messiah. You're captured by a false view." As a Christian, you come back to your Jewish friend and ask, "Is Judaism true?" they would most certainly say it is. Absolutely true. Then why aren't you telling other people about it? Why aren't you proselytizing me and telling me about your faith? Do you know what they would most likely say? Because it's for us. It's not for you. It's for us. It's not for you.

There's a whole book in the Bible based on that statement. The book of Jonah. The underlying theme of the book of Jonah is the heart of the Jewish people. This is for us. It's not for you. Jonah goes to the seaport to get on the ship, not to go to Nineveh, but because God opened the door to go to Tarshish ... which is a little follow-up lesson that you don't always walk through open doors as the only means of determining the will of God, do you? Jonah was pretty sure that door was open to go to Tarshish, but God had told him to go to Nineveh. When he got there and he preached salvation and repentance, the Ninevites responded in belief and a great revival broke out. What did Jonah do? He celebrated nonstop for 24 hours that the grace of God had been welcomed and received. No, he did not. He sat under a palm tree and complained to God about the fact that he knew this was what God was going to do and he didn't want these people, whom he hated, to receive the grace of God in their life.

Many, many years ago, the Southern Baptist convention, at one of their annual conventions, passed a resolution to increase their efforts to reach Jewish people. That made the news on CBS, ABC, NBC, CNN and there was a great outcry. What is wrong with these Christians that they're attempting to proselytize Jews? Well, that's what Paul

is speaking of here. Look at that verb “make” at the end of verse 11. It's a word of intent. It's a word of purpose. God's intent and His purpose is to make the Jewish people jealous. It's one of the few places in the Bible where you'll see the word “jealous” used in a positive way. God is using salvation among Gentiles to make Jewish people jealous. They are to see what we have and want it. Like 1 Peter 3. Let them see the hope that is within you. let them ask of the hope that is within you. be ready to give them an answer of the hope that is within you.

We have to stop at this point and say what are they seeing in our life? What are they seeing in our life that they would want? Too often, sadly what they're seeing are Christians who want what the world has. How ironic! Here we are. We're the peculiar people. We're the people called out to be different and we find ourselves too often pursuing what the world has when they're supposed to be looking at us and saying what is different? In all of the chaos, in all of the confusion, in all the things going on in our world, how do you possibly maintain a joyful spirit? How are you not consumed with worry like I am over the things that are happening in our country and are happening in our world? How sad when Christians are unattractive. When the very thing that is on the heart of God is that we would be so attractive that literally the world, and in this particular context the Jewish people, would look at us and say I wonder what it would be like to have a relationship with God that seems personal and intimate. You talk to Him. You read your Bible like He's actually talking to you ... because that's what's happening. That's what's taking place. Doctor Hendricks used to say if it's not working in your life, if it's not working in your family, don't export it to anybody else. We're to be winsome. We're to be attractive. There is to be something about us. That's the first blessing and that really covers whatever else happens in these remaining verses.

Let's look at the second blessing. The second blessing is the blessing of divine riches. In verses 12 through 14. verse 12. This is one of those “how much more” situations. “Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will full inclusion mean?” We have three times that Paul's talks about “their”. Their trespasses. Their failure. Their full inclusion. Two times he uses the word “riches”. “Their” is a reference to Israel, to the Jewish people. Between their transgression and between their riches. Between their failure and the

riches that come to the world. What is between Israel's failure, Israel's transgression, and the riches that God brings to others? What is in between those two things? The sovereignty of God is between their failure, their transgression, and the riches that God arranges to bring to the Gentiles and to the world. Only God can take Jewish unbelief and bring about Gentile salvation. Only God can take Gentile salvation and cause the Jewish people to become jealous over what they have.

All of this resulting in Israel's fullness. Their full inclusion, he says. The word full or fullness is *pleroma*. It can talk about fullness in terms of quality, or it can talk about it in terms of quantity. I suppose it could be both, but I can think it's probably the latter. I think he's looking forward to this day when this fullness of revival is going to break out among God's people. In great numbers they are going to respond to the preaching of the gospel. John Murray, who is not a premillennialist but has an excellent commentary, says this about this verse: "Nothing less than a restoration of Israel as a people of faith, a people of privilege and blessing, can satisfy the terms of this passage." He is just saying, I believe that Israel has a future. I believe that God is not done with Israel. I believe that God is going to yet do something within ethnic Israel as the people of God.

Then Paul adds a personal word of ministry. Verses 13 and 14. "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles..." The majority of the church in Rome probably is Gentile as we've said at this time. "...Inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry..." They are his ministry. He is lifting them up. "...in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them." Paul points out his own role as an example in what he's just been talking about in the previous verses. Only a sovereign, providential, working God would take a Jew to go reach the Gentiles. If you and I were going to come up with a plan to go reach Gentiles, we'd say first off we need to find a Gentile. God says, no. I'm going to take the most passionate, zealous Jew on the planet and he's going to go to be a missionary to the Gentiles. It is the work of God. Verse 14 simply repeats what he said in verse 11.

Notice the last blessing. The final one in verse 15. The blessing of divine reconciliation. "For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?" Verse 15 is really a further restatement of verse 12. It begins with an explanation. For. And again, there's something of an

unexpected outcome here. Who would have foreseen that out of this rejection and out of this unbelief that there would come this amazing reconciliation that Paul is speaking of yet to come? That God is going to turn failure and transgression and sin and rejection into reconciliation. And what is reconciliation? It is when two parties can't get along with each other. It is when two parties are at odds with each other. God is going to take these parties that are at odds with each other. These parties are God and us. We need to be reconciled to God. Paul spoke of that earlier in Romans. Some of you can testify to that personally. Maybe within your marriage there was a point that seemed like you were headed towards irreconcilable differences. God stepped in and brought about reconciliation. Maybe that happened in your family. Maybe that happened with a friend. We've all experienced that on some level. We're at odds with somebody, and God in His grace brings about reconciliation. God is always at work. We don't always see it, but God is always at work, always advancing His will.

And then this last thought. There is resurrection truth. How appropriate that there is resurrection truth as here in just a couple of weeks we center in on that specifically. Look at verse 15. "For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?" To turn from unbelief and to literally embrace the gospel of salvation by grace through faith. What could be a better picture of that than resurrection? It is literally taking us from death to life. It is taking us from darkness into light. He aptly speaks of it as being a resurrection. I can't help but think in the back of Paul's mind as he describes what he does in that verse – will their acceptance mean but life from the dead – don't you think that maybe he had in his mind Ezekiel 37?

Ezekiel stood over the valley of dry bones and all he saw was dead bones. The Spirit of God moved across that valley and brings those dead bones to life, brings life out of death, brings about resurrection. The blessing of God on Israel and all of the believers in the millennium is ultimately this "how much more" that he's talking about in this 15th verse. It brings to mind Isaiah 11:9 "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord. Do you think that we live in that day? Are we anywhere near the earth being full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea? That day is coming, my

friend. I believe that day is coming in the millennium when Christ the King will reign on the earth and there will be the outpouring of blessings untold, unimaginable to us now just as Isaiah has described it. Because here's the deal. God often closes one door to open another door. And He always does it with His glory ultimately being at the forefront of His purpose.

What do we take away? Let's ask God to give us the heart of the apostle Paul. With that, say I don't want to go to heaven alone. I want to take a bunch of people with me. I don't want to go to heaven alone. I want to take a bunch of people with me. This causes me to ask myself again – who am I praying for? Who is your one? Who am I so burdened for with regard to their salvation that they're on my heart, on my mind every time I come to God? They may be a coworker, family member, friend, neighbor but they're all around us. Our prayer needs to be God, don't let me go to heaven alone. Let me take a whole bunch of people with me.

Maybe you're that one this morning. Maybe you've never put your trust and your faith in Christ alone. You've grown up in church, or you've hardly ever gone to church, but your understanding of how to get to heaven has been you've got to get there on your own as best you can. That's really bad news, my friend, because none of us can ever be good enough to get to heaven on our own, because the only way to get to heaven is to be 100% perfect for all of your life. That's impossible ... except that there is somebody who has done that. His name is Jesus. He died on the cross for your sins and for mine. All He asks us to do is to believe that, to trust, to put our faith in what He has done, to receive the forgiveness of sin, to be reconciled with God, and receive the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, do that good work even now in these closing moments. Holy Spirit, open hearts to the gospel of Your grace. Do the unexpected, Father. Cause someone to move from death to life, from darkness to light. Father, we love You. We are in awe of Your ways. Your purposes are always perfect. We are so very grateful. In Jesus's name, amen.