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Romans Road to Recovery / Romans 10:18–21

This brings us to our focus for today: While Israel stumbled, God remains the One with arms outstretched, persistently inviting a resistant people.

Notes

Rom. 10:18-21 Title: "The Sting of Rejection," Subtitle: God's Persistent Reach, Main Idea: While Israel stumbled, God remains the One with arms outstretched, persistently inviting a resistant people, Scripture: Isaiah 65:1-2

Title: The Sting of Rejection

Subtitle: God's Persistent Reach **Text:** Romans 10:18-21 (Supporting: Isaiah 65:1-2)

INTRODUCTION

- In September of 1780, General George Washington experienced a betrayal that broke his heart. He discovered that Benedict Arnold—a brilliant commander he had mentored, fiercely defended, and loved like a son—had sold him out to the enemy. Witnesses reported that Washington was so overwhelmed by the personal betrayal that he wept, asking his aides, "Whom can we trust now?" We all understand this visceral pain. When you pour your life and love into someone, only to have them turn their back on you, it leaves an agonizing, profound sting.
- Yet, as staggering as that human betrayal is, it pales in comparison to what we see in our text today. As we arrive at the end of Romans chapter 10, the Apostle Paul pulls back the curtain to show us a stunning reality: God, the Creator of the universe, willingly subjects Himself to an unmatched sting of rejection, the likes of which no one else has ever seen.

Remember where we are in this grand theological treatise of the Apostle Paul's, called Romans. In chapter 9, Paul dealt with Israel's past election. Next week, in chapter 11, we will see Israel's future restoration. But here in chapter 10, we are dealing with Israel's present day rejection. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, Jesus Christ, because they sought righteousness by their own effort rather than by faith.

- **The Two Alibis:** As Paul addresses this present rejection, he anticipates the two strongest objections—the ultimate alibis—that his fellow countrymen might use to justify their unbelief. They will try to claim, "*We never heard the message,*" and if that fails, "*We didn't understand it.*" Today, we are going to watch Paul systematically dismantle both of these alibis before he reveals the true, heartbreaking reason for their condition.

This brings us to our focus for today:

Main Idea:

While Israel stumbled, God remains the One with arms outstretched, persistently inviting a resistant people.

[TRANSITION] * But when we hear that a privileged people have stumbled so severely, human nature immediately looks for a loophole. We want to ask, "*Well, whose fault is it? Did God not make it clear enough?*" The easiest alibi for rejection is simply claiming ignorance. As we dive into our text today, Paul anticipates this exact defense mechanism from his fellow Israelites. Did they stumble because God kept the Gospel a secret? Paul answers that question by completely dismantling their first excuse.

I. God's Truth Tears Down all Excuses as it Echoes Across the Earth! (Romans 10:18)

Romans 10:18 "*18 But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world."*

- Paul acts as a defense attorney in this verse, anticipating the objections of his fellow countrymen. If Israel has rejected the Messiah, is it because they simply were never told?

In this verse, Paul tears down the premise of this rhetorical question. Here...

A. The Alibi of Ignorance is Destroyed! (Romans 10:18a)

- Paul asks in verse 18: "But I ask, have they not heard?"
- It is a fair question.
- You cannot be held responsible for a message you were never given.
- Paul addresses this objection that some might give by giving a global reassurance.

B. Creation Itself Broadcasts the Invitation! (Romans 10:18b)

- Paul answers in the 2nd phrase of this verse with a resounding, "Indeed they have [heard]," quoting

Psalm 19:4: "*Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.*"

- Paul is calling back to the theological bedrock he laid down right at the

beginning of this letter! Remember Romans 1:20? He declared that the external witness of creation—**God's invisible attributes and eternal power displayed in the world**—leaves all humanity without excuse.

We are reminded in Acts 14:17 of yet another external witness:

Acts 14:17 *"Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness."*

- God didn't just write His invitation in the stars; He wrote it in the rain, the harvest, and the provision of daily food. Every good thing humanity experienced was a witness to God's goodness, leaving them entirely without excuse.
- But it is not just external witnesses that God gives to all humanity; there is an internal witness as well.
 - Ecclesiastes 3:11 tells us that God has "**put eternity into man's heart.**" God has hardwired the human soul with an innate awareness that there is something—and Someone—greater than this temporal world.
- The same God who painted His glory across the heavens has placed the echo of eternity in every human chest. Between **the witness of creation outside** and **the witness of eternity inside**, no one can stand before God and claim they did not know. The invitation has been broadcasted and continues to be broadcasted perfectly!

There is yet another alibi, another objection that Paul needs to dismantle, as he reveals the nature and purpose of God's attention being directed away from Israel for the time being.

That purpose is that...

II. God's Scandalous Grace is to Provoke a Rebellious Nation to Wake Up! (Romans 10:19-20)

Romans 10:19–20 *"19 But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? First Moses says, "I will make you jealous by that which is not a nation, By a nation without understanding will I anger you." 20 And Isaiah is very bold and says, "I was found by those who did not seek Me, I became manifest to those who did not ask for Me.""*

- In these verses, Paul raises the next rhetorical question, the next excuse or roadblock to salvation. If they heard the message, maybe they just didn't understand the

theology? Paul destroys that excuse next.

In the beginning of Rom. 10:19...

A. The Alibi of Misunderstanding is Shattered! (Romans 10:19a)

- Verse 19 asks: "But I ask, did Israel not understand?" Again, Paul goes back to the Old Testament Scriptures to prove that God told them exactly what He was going to do.
- All the objections to or excuses about God's redemptive plan can be answered directly in the Bible, like Paul is doing here in Romans.
- The most powerful way to witness of God's salvation is to point others to what the Bible says, rather than what our opinions are. The only caveat to that is that, in order to do that, we must know the Bible.
- Through these passages that Paul alludes to, it becomes clear not only that God is waiting for them, but that their ongoing rejection demands Him to endure the sting as He holds wide open His arms to receive them back. But it takes an act of God to see them return to Him, as we see clearly in chapter 11 in the coming weeks.

But here in this verse we are told that...

B. God Ignites a Holy Jealousy to Draw Them Home! (Romans 10:19b)

- Paul quotes Moses from Deuteronomy 32:21. God says He will use a "foolish nation" (the Gentiles), "*those who are not a people*" to provoke Israel to return to Him.
- This "*anger you/provoke you*" is the Greek word *parazēlōsō*—to provoke to a burning jealousy!
- God isn't saving the Gentiles just to punish Israel; He is doing it to wake them up! He is pouring out His covenant blessings on outsiders to create a divine, redemptive rivalry. He wants them to see the joy of grace and be drawn - be motivated to come back!
- Think of the Prophet Jonah, primarily called to be a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel! He is the Old Testament picture of this exact "jealousy" dynamic! When God showed scandalous compassion to the wicked, Gentile city of Nineveh (the capital city of the barbaric Assyrians who would destroy them), what did Jonah do? He sat on a hill outside the city, furious, with his arms crossed in bitter jealousy, as He directly complained to God about His compassion for these evil and undeserving people! God used the salvation of outsiders to expose

the hardness of Jonah's heart and provoke him to see God's true character.

- Or think of Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son! Who was standing outside the party with his arms crossed, furious at the grace being shown to a rebellious sinner? The older brother! Israel is the older brother, standing outside the feast of grace. But what does the Father do? He comes outside and pleads with him to come in! God is throwing a joyous banquet for the Gentiles so that Israel will hear the music, see the dancing, feel the jealousy, and come running back to the table!

C. The Ultimate Plot Twist is that Grace Intercepts Those Who Never Sought It! (Romans 10:20)

- In verse 20, Paul quotes Isaiah 65:1, noting that Isaiah had to be *apolutos*—"exceptionally daring" to preach this.
- Why? Because it was a scandalous, unexpected message! God says, "I have been found by those who did not seek me."
- Nineveh is the Historical Proof of this Plot Twist! The Ninevites were not searching the Scriptures. They were not praying to Yahweh. They were a brutal, pagan empire. **Yet**, God dispatched a prophet across the ancient world to intercept them **with mercy!**
- **Think about the divine paradox of that grace:** God extended His mercy to pagan Gentiles who had zero interest in Him. It completely flipped the script on the religious elite, proving once and for all that salvation cannot be earned by our own righteous pursuit—it can only be received by His astonishing grace through faith!

Ephesians 2:11-13 *"Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh... remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near..."*

- The Gentiles had zero spiritual heritage, no covenants, and no hope. The fact that God intercepted them with grace is the ultimate proof that salvation is **a gift**, not a wage earned by religious heritage.

Matthew 21:43 *"Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits."*

- This shows that Paul isn't making up new theology in Romans 10; he is echoing the direct teachings of Jesus.
- Jesus warned the religious leaders that this exact provocation was coming.

Here's the most beautiful part of it all. Despite the stinging continual rejection of His own chosen people...

III. God's Relentless Patience Keeps His Arms Wide Open to a Stubborn People! (Romans 10:21)

Romans 10:21 *"21 But as for Israel He says, "**All the day long** I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."*

- If the Gentiles found God without looking, what is the status of Israel, who had the law and the covenants, a yet rejected?
- We find the answer in a deeply emotional clash of two actions.

First...

A. God Refuses to Abandon Those He has Chosen Even though they, at times, Abandon Him: The Father Holds His Arms Wide Open! (Romans 10:21a)

- Verse 21 quotes Isaiah 65:2: "But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands...'"
- Remember George Washington weeping over Benedict Arnold's betrayal? Human nature, when betrayed, crosses its arms and walks away. But God refuses to abandon those He has chosen who have abandoned Him!
- The Greek word for this posture is *exepetasa*. It is the image of a bird throwing its wings wide open for its young to be protected under.
- This is not a God standing with crossed arms of condemnation. This is a pleading Father with His arms thrown wide open! And He maintains this agonizing posture "all day long"—demonstrating inexhaustible, relentless patience as He endures the sting of their rejection over and over again.

Matthew 23:37 *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!"*

- Jesus uses this exact, heartbreaking imagery! He stood overlooking the city that was about to crucify Him, holding His arms out like a mother hen. And what was their response? "You were not willing."

Ezekiel 33:11 *"Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?"*

- This shatters the false view of a cold, vindictive God. God does not cross His arms and gloat when people reject Him. He pleads with them: **Turn back!** ---

The sad reality, even after all this invitation of God, is humanities response.

B. The Tragedy of the Crossed Arms is that a Stubborn People Argue with an Open-Armed God! (Romans 10:21b)

- Who is God holding His hands out to? "...to a disobedient and contrary people."
- They are *apeithounta*—possessing hardened, unpersuadable hearts.
- They are *antilegonta*—literally "speaking against" or contradicting God.
- God has His arms wide open in love, but the people are crossing their arms, shaking their heads, and arguing back. **This is the ultimate sting of rejection.**
- Notice that Paul treats unbelief as an act of disobedience. In the Gospel, faith is not just agreeing with a set of facts; **it is an act of submission.** To reject Christ is not just a theological error; it is an act of high-handed rebellion against the outstretched arms of God.

CONCLUSION

- Looking ahead: If Israel rejected God's outstretched arms, is God done with them? Has He finally dropped His hands in the final defeat of ultimate rejection? Paul will answer that next week as we move into Romans 11.
- Spoiler alert: God never gives up on His plan or His chosen people.

Most or maybe even all of us are not Israel, so what does all of this have to do with us?

We must put our faith into action, or it's not true faith:

1. ++**Examine Your Own Posture:**
2. ++**Rest in God's Relentless Grace:**
3. ++**Emulate the Heart of God towards others:**

1. Examine Your Own Posture:

Are there areas in your life where you are crossing your arms at God? Are you arguing with His Word? Repent of the stubbornness that rejects God's leading.

2. Rest in God's Relentless Grace:

If you feel you have drifted, failed, or run away, recognize that God has not turned His back on you. His posture toward you right now is *exepetasa*—arms wide open, waiting for you to come home.

3. Emulate the Heart of God towards others:

When you look at a lost world—or at friends and family who actively argue against your faith—do not cross your arms in judgment. Emulate the posture of your Father: keep your arms open and your heart patient, all day long.

* As we close today, I want to take you back to that story we started with—George Washington and the heartbreak of Benedict Arnold's betrayal.

- How did Washington respond to the sting of rejection? He dispatched men to hunt Arnold down. He ordered that if Arnold was captured, he was to be immediately hanged. Washington closed his heart, crossed his arms, and demanded justice. Arnold ultimately died in London—broken, bankrupt, and despised—forever exiled because the arms of his commander were permanently closed to him.
- That is how human beings handle betrayal. When we are rejected, we cross our arms, we lock the gates, and we walk away.
- But folks, God is not George Washington. The Gospel is not the story of a Commander hunting down traitors to destroy them. The Gospel is the story of a Commander who, when betrayed by His own creation, sent His Son to die for them.
- This is the magnificent, heartbreaking paradox of Romans 10. The **tragedy** is found in **our** posture: we so often stand in defiance, with hearts that are unpersuadable (*apeithounta*) and mouths that argue back (*antilegonta*). But the **triumph** is found in **God's** posture.
- While we stumble in our rebellion, God remains the One with arms outstretched, persistently inviting a resistant people.
- Even when we speak against Him... His arms remain stretched out, all day long.
- How long must God wait and how much of God's blessing do we forfeit along the way, simple by not fully surrendering to Him.

Human betrayal crosses its arms and walks away, but divine grace throws its arms wide open and stays. Today, stop your arguing, uncross your arms, and step into the relentless reach of God.