

*This sermon is part of a series entitled Elevated to the Mobility based on Romans 9 and 11. Romans 9 – Rags and Riches. Romans 11 – Rejection and Reconciliation.*

If last week's theme – rags and riches – is the quintessential American storyline, then this week's theme – rejection and reconciliation – is the quintessential American plot line. Think of nearly any movie or book you want, but somewhere along the line, there is conflict and resolution, in other words, rejection and reconciliation. Freulein Maria is essentially *rejected* by the abbey before *reconciling* with the Mother Superior's wiser path. Lawrence of Arabia is *rejected* by his fellow officers before being *reconciled*, indeed celebrated, for his achievements among the Arab tribes. Moses is rejected by the Israelites, before reconciling with them through the miraculous plagues. I could go on and on with other examples from entertainment, or I could just go on with more examples from Moses and Israelites.

Last week we took a closer look at the chosen nation of Israel. We recounted how they had been given every blessing, every opportunity, a host of riches, from the Lord God's gracious hand. And yet, not only did they regularly reject him, they ultimately rejected the fulfillment of all his promises. They rejected the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ, and in so doing, they moved from riches to rags.

But in God's gracious way, their loss has become our gain. It is we, lost in sin and condemned creatures that we are, who have been blessed with the riches of God's grace: forgiveness of sins, a new life in Jesus Christ, and eternal salvation. It is we who have been elevated to the mobility, moving up from lost and condemned to become forgiven and freed as God's chosen people, his holy nation of the new covenant, a declaration of God's goodness in the lives of his people.

Paul, then, spends the rest of chapter

9 going into further detail about all of this, including the availability of God's grace, not only to Israel again and again and again, but also the gospel's availability, indeed its intended invitation all along, to include those *not* of the *physical* House of Israel.

Paul explains in verses immediately following our text last week from chapter 9(8), ***It is not children of the flesh who are God's children, but it is children of the promise who are counted as his descendants.*** You see, the message of Jesus Christ, and the salvation to be found in him, is for all people, all nations. The Lord had been declaring this already, but especially in the days of Isaiah the Prophet. Look at our first reading for today. The Lord declared ***My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples.***

Paul is simply pointing to the fulfillment of this prophecy when he affirms in chapter 10(:12,13) ***There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all, who gives generously to all who call on him. Yes, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*** (Paul quotes here from Joel 2:22)

But then Paul concludes chapter 10 with these sad words, also from the Prophet Isaiah (65:2), ***But about Israel [the Lord] says: All day long I stretched out my hands to a people who disobey and oppose me.*** You see, Israel got so caught up in the outward actions of their lives of faith, that they lost sight of why they were living their lives of faith in the first place.

Paul makes an interesting analogy later in chapter 9 referencing the ridiculousness when the thing that is created challenges the Creator. But that's exactly what Israel did. When the Lord was looking for the faithful attitude of their hearts, they told him that it should be about their *works* not their hearts. Paul explains (9:31,32), ***Israel, while pursuing the law as a way of righteousness, did not reach it. Why? Because they kept pursuing it not by faith, but as if it comes by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone...and refused the***

gracious hand of the Lord to lift them up again. God hadn't rejected Israel. Israel had rejected him.

And so ends the story of God's chosen people of Israel. The God of free and faithful grace finally said, enough's enough. Too bad. So sad. I reject you.

And that would be too bad, so sad, if it were true. But it's not. You see, our theme today isn't about *rejection and rejection*.

No, our theme is about *rejection and reconciliation*, and for good reason. Paul declares in the opening verses of chapter 11, ***So I say did God reject his people? Absolutely not!*** He then goes on to cite the very account of Elijah and the prophets of Baal we talked about last week. ***...or don't you know what Scripture says about Elijah, how he was pleading with God against Israel...But what did God's answer tell him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So in the same way at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.*** (11:1,2,4,5)

In fact, Paul offers himself as an example that there were and are those from the *physical* House of Israel that are also from the *spiritual* House of Israel, ***thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord.*** (7:25) And this is what gives Paul hope. Even as he mourns the loss of Israel as a whole, he has been blessed to see, through eyes of faith, the reconciliation that God is bringing about through his mission work among the gentiles.

OK, so let me get this straight, Paul. You're saying that Israel's *rejection* of the Lord may lead some of them to *reconciliation* with the Lord? I don't get it. Paul explains in the verse just prior to our text for today (11:11) ***...by [Israel's] trespass, salvation came to the Gentiles to make the Israelites jealous.***

I don't know about you, but it sounds a bit like a grade school love triangle, doesn't it? I really like Susie, but she doesn't seem to like me. So, I think I'll be really nice to Mary to try and make Susie

jealous. And then, maybe Susie will like me more. Oh yeah, that's going to work. And even if it does, is that really a relationship you want to foster, a relationship built on emotional manipulation?

But understand, God wasn't looking to establish a relationship with his people. No, they had rejected him through a willful misunderstanding of God's intentions. God chose them, honored them, as the people from which the Savior of the world would come. They liked the *honor*, they just didn't want to share him with the world. And eventually, they twisted their honored status into a way that they hoped to manipulate God through their works, withhold him from others, essentially bury him and his Messiah in the back of their cupboard along with Grandma's china, only to be pulled out on special occasions.

Just look at Luke chapter 4. Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth. Already recognized as a gifted teacher, the Synagogue leaders felt that they were doing Jesus a favor, honoring him, by asking him to lead worship that day. Jesus read from the Prophet Isaiah, a beautiful prophecy about the Messiah and the Messiah's ministry to all those captured by sin. Then Jesus declared that he himself was the fulfillment of that prophecy and sat down.

As Luke describes the aftermath to this declaration, you can almost hear the inner turmoil as the people were drawn in by Jesus' gracious words, but struggled to reconcile their own thinking with God's reality in Jesus.

Knowing that they were already beginning to reject him, Jesus warns them by pointing to other examples in Scripture when God's people rejected him. And it was at these times that God would highlight how the gospel message, though rejected in Israel, continued to be shared and received by those outside the physical House of Israel – yeah, Gentiles, like most of us.

And when the crowd heard this, they lost it. They were so filled with rage in their jealousy that they literally tried to throw

Jesus not just out of town, but out of town, on the side town, that ended with a sheer cliff. **[Jesus] passed through the middle of them and went on his way.** (Luke 4:30) Just one more time he was rejected by God's people.

Paul himself displayed, and admitted to, this same kind of murderous jealousy in the days when he was called Saul, the Pharisee. There he was hunting down Christians, approving their murders, rejecting the promised Messiah from the God of free and faithful grace. Yet it was this murderous jealousy that the Lord used to push the message of Salvation through Jesus to the Gentiles as Jewish Christians fled with it to Gentile towns like Damascus, Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, Corinth, and yes, even Rome.

This is why Paul declares in our text for today, **as long as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I am going to speak highly of my ministry. Perhaps (just like himself) I may make my own people jealous, and so save some of them.** Paul is so excited about his ministry because it affirms for him God's gracious purposes at work among *all* peoples.

So let me run this again: God didn't make Israel jealous in order to get the gospel to the Gentiles. No, the gospel would go to the Gentiles no matter what, as we established before. Rather, God used the sinful jealousy welling up in the hearts of his chosen people to further the Gospel among the Gentiles, all the while, sending a wake up call to his chosen people.

In the end, all of this simply underscores those familiar words from Romans chapter 8 (:28), **We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose.**

And so, though Israel may have willfully stumbled, God used their rejection not only to further bless the Gentiles, but also to reconcile himself with the remnant of Israel, and all to demonstrate his grace to the glory of his name.

Paul compares this rejection and reconciliation with resurrection from the dead. **For if [Israel's] rejection meant the reconciliation of the world, what does their acceptance mean other than the dead coming to life?**

And finally, that's what all of this is about: life, be it life now or life in eternity. If you sit where you're at today as a believer, be it Jewish or Gentile, give thanks for God's grace in your life. Recognize, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 5:18), that **all these things are from God, who reconciled [you] to himself through Christ.**

If you sit where you're at today, a former believer who has rejected the Lord, a de-churched believer who is heading down that same path to rejection, or maybe you feel rejected by other believers, know that **In regard to the gospel...God's gracious gifts and call are not regretted** by him. Oh no, he longs to shower you with his mercy. His deepest desire is to reconcile himself with you. Com, join us as we gather around his gospel message of forgiveness and grace. After all, of us, as Paul puts it, **were once disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy...so that by the mercy shown to [us, others] may be shown mercy too,** all according to God's gracious plan. Because this isn't about rejection and rejection, or rejection and execution, or rejection and obliteration. No, this about life for all, not destruction for all. As Paul explains, God has allowed us all, though spiritually dead, to live **imprisoned ...in [our own] disobedience** (rather than executed for it) **so that he may have opportunity to show mercy to all** in Christ. Why? Because **in Christ...all will be made alive.**

Rags to riches, rejection to reconciliation, you have been elevated to the mobility from **the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.**