



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 11: 11-24

Romans

“The Chain of Blessing”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Romans 11:11-24; this is a glorious passage, but it's not an easy one. I was thinking as we gathered hear this morning, it's early in the morning and we've got to use our thinking caps this morning to follow though the reasoning of the apostle. He writes, "I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous. Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the, of the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and become, became partakers with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either. Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree,

how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?" May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness, and Your grace, and Your blessings to us, and we come to a magnificent passage of scripture, complicated to some degree, but full of magnificent truth and full of the truth of your grace. And we, who have believed in Jesus Christ, we who are gentiles by nature are wild branches grafted into an olive tree that was not our own, but you have made us part of Your people, and we have a destiny that is glorious. And so, Father, we should be humble as Paul exhorted the gentiles in Rome to be humble and appreciative of what we have in Jesus Christ.

So, Father, may that be the result of our time together. May we have a clearer understanding of who we are and why we are the people that we are, and we may have a great appreciation for your goodness and grace. We pray for ourselves spiritually. We pray for also our material needs and they are great. We pray for those who are sick, those who are recovering from surgeries, those who are anticipating surgery. We think of Mike **Amos**. We pray that you'd bless him this week as he undergoes surgery. And we pray for the **Ladwig** family as they are dealing with sickness in their family. We pray that you give healing and encouragement.

And, Father, for others whose names are listed on the prayer request list and those whose names aren't. There are so many of us, Father, who struggle with various things and struggle privately. We pray that You'd give blessing and encouragement and enable all of us regardless of our condition in life, whether it's one of trial or one of pleasantness and joy. Pray that You'd enable us to understand that what we have we have by Your determining will, but also Your goodness and Your grace because everything that touches our lives is for our good. So help us to appreciate that, help us to remember that You are a sovereign, and good, and faithful God in all things in life.

We pray for those who are experiencing particular difficulty and pray that you give encouragement. We pray that You bless our nation, bless our leaders, give them wisdom as they guide our nation. We pray for our troops

abroad, that you give them protection and success, and we pray for this land that You bless it spiritually. Bless us spiritually. We pray for ourselves at this hour, the hour to come, the Sunday school classes. Bless the teachers as they teach. Bless us this evening as we return to worship You in this place. May that be a blessed time and edifying to each of us. And bless us now, Father, as we sing our final hymn, prepare our hearts for our time of study together. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] We have a complicated passage and that was a complicated hymn. You did well on the hymn. I think you'll do well on the passage if I do. The German philosopher Hegel once made an interesting statement about the Jews. Hegel believed that he understood the meaning of history. He had constructed it, as his understanding of how it unfolded according to thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. But when it came to the history of the Jews, he confessed, "It is a dark, troublesome enigma to me. I am not able to understand it. It does not fit in with any of our categories. It is a riddle."

This is the riddle that Paul unwraps in Romans 11 as he explains Israel's present place in history and its future. The great question that Paul answers in Romans 11 is does Israel have a future? From the circumstances, it would seem that the nation does not. Israel has rejected Christ. It is largely in unbelief. If God was dealing with the nation according to merit, then he would've left the nation to its own destruction.

In fact, the chapter begins with the question, has God rejected His people? And Paul's answer is emphatic. He says no, "May it never be!" "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew." That is the great theme of this chapter. Verse 2, "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew," and Paul puts the theme of the chapter there in verse 2 in the negative, but in verse 26, he puts it in the positive. "All Israel will be saved." The proof leading up to that climactic statement is given in two parts.

The first we covered last week. It's verses 1 through 10. Paul shows there that Israel's rejection is only partial. There's still a remnant of believing Jews today. Paul is an example of that, which shows that God has not completely cast off His people. He is still dealing with the nation Israel.

Second, in verses 11 through 32, Paul explains that Israel's rejection is not permanent. There's a general hardening on the nation. Paul concluded the first ten verses on that note, and it is true for individual unbelievers that is permanent, but Paul is discussing the future of the Jews as a nation. And to correct any possible misinterpretation about the hardening of Israel in verses 11 through 16, Paul denies that Israel's rejection by God is a final permanent rejection.

"I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be!" Meaning, the fall of the Jews did not put them beyond recovery. It was not a fatal fall for the nation. It fit in God's plan. Israel stumbled over Christ as it was prophesied in the Old Testament, Isaiah 8 in verse 14 speaks of Christ as the stone of stumbling, but that did not happen for the purpose of Israel's destruction. God used it for the gentile's deliverance, as Paul explains, "By their transgression," meaning by the Jews' rejection of Christ, salvation has come to the gentiles. God's eternal plan of salvation always include the gentiles. All the way back to the beginning when God made promises to Abraham in Genesis 12 and in verse 3 he states that in Abraham all the families of the earth will be blessed, all of the nations, the gentiles will be blessed in Abraham as well.

It was Jewish unbelief that occasioned the fulfillment of that great promise. It fit within God's plan that through their unbelief, gentiles would be blessed, but that is not the end. That is not the final purpose. Paul writes, "Salvation has come to the Gentiles to make them," that is, make the Jews jealous, to provoke them so that they will believe and be saved. That in turn will mean blessing for the whole world as Paul goes on to explain in verse 12. We can understand Paul's reasoning here, his explanation, in three stages.

It is like a chain with three links. The first link is Israel, the second link is the gentiles, and the third link is the world. First, Israel's rejection of Christ has brought salvation to the gentiles. Second, gentile salvation will cause Jewish envy leading to faith and salvation. And third, Israel's recovery will result in blessing for the world. Verse 12, "Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much

more will their fulfillment be!"

There are three stages of God's plan for Israel and ultimately for His plan for the world. Three links, which have been called the chain of blessing. God's purpose for the nation is not its ruin, but its recovery, and through its recovery, worldwide blessing. Hegel may not have understood the history of the Jews. In fact, secular historians cannot understand it, left to their own reasoning and the facts that they have to deal with. In verse 25, Paul speaks of the mystery of Israel. The truths about the nation must be revealed, but Jewish history is the key to world history. First, Israel's failure brought salvation to the gentiles and we see that all through the book of Acts, as Paul carried the Gospel to foreign lands, as he carried the Gospel to the gentiles, it was his practice to go, first of all, to the synagogue. He'd come to a city, he'd go to the synagogue. He would preach to the Jews. And when they rejected the Gospel, then he would go to the gentiles.

In Acts 13 on the first missionary journey, he and Paul, he and Barnabas rather, visited the city in Antioch in Asia Minor or modern-day southern Turkey, they went to the synagogue, they preached the Gospel, they preached the cross and the resurrection, and many Jews believed, but many did not. Most did not. In fact, they became jealous of the large crowd that Paul attracted through his preaching and they became hostile. They contradicted the things that he said. He taught out of the scriptures and they'd deny that his teaching was correct. In fact, Luke says they blasphemed.

So Paul and Barnabas said, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles." And then, Luke writes, "When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed." So there was Jewish rejection and there was gentile reception. And so it went.

As the first decades of the church unfolded, Jewish reception of the Gospel decreased and gentile acceptance of the Gospel increased. It was a fulfillment of the parable, in fact, a number of parables, but one of the parables that I thought of was Luke 14:16-24, the parable of a man who gave

a big dinner and he invited guests, but the original guests wouldn't come. They had various excuses. They had business to take care of. A man, one man had bought a field. He needed to tend to that. Another man bought some oxen. He needed to take care of them. And so, these original guests all declined the offer. They didn't want to come to his banquet. And so, the man invited other guests. He sent his slave out to call the poor and the crippled. He sent his servant into the highways and along the hedges to fill his house for the banquet, but he said, "None of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner."

Because Israel rejected the Gospel, God has filled His house with poor and crippled gentiles. He turned the tragedy of Jewish unbelief into the blessing of gentile salvation. Now, that's typical of the grace of God, and we find that all through the Bible. God takes tragedy and He turns it into blessing. He takes the failure of one and brings it, turns it into the success of another. He turned the tragedy of Jewish unbelief into the blessing of gentile salvation and as His house fills up, the second stage of God's purpose for the Jews occurs. They will be provoked to jealousy as they witness the salvation that was promised to them, the blessings that were prophesied to them going to other people, going to gentiles of all people.

That, I think, that second stage, that second link in this chain of blessing of gentile salvation provoking unbelieving Jews to jealousy in faith, that is to my mind, a veiled challenge to Christians. Maybe it's no so veiled, but it's certainly a challenge because our lives ought to be lived in such a way that Jewish people desire what we have. Of course, they should be lived so that everyone Jew and gentile alike desire what we have. But the special concern here is for the Jewish people who have a significant unique role in history. And Paul is saying that our live should be lived in a way and our conduct should be carried out in a way that provokes them to jealousy to desire what we have.

Now, what we have is new life. What we have is the very life of God within us. We have eternal life. We possess the holy spirit who is actively changing us producing what Paul calls the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22,

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and a list of virtues that are supernaturally produced within us. Our lives are transformed, they're changed, and these are the things, these are the virtues that should be in evidence in our lives, and should make Jewish people envious of us for possessing life that they don't have, but life that was promised to them. They should long to have that as they see it in us.

Unfortunately what they have often seen is something very different. Leon Morris in his commentary on the book of Romans gives a severe critique of the church generally, historically. Instead of showing Jewish people the attractiveness of the Christian life, he writes that too often Christians have treated the Jews with hatred, prejudice, persecution, malice, and all uncharitableness. "Christians," he said, "should not take this passage calmly." A church is to be a witness to the Jews, not a hindrance. Being a witness involves more than one thing. It involves a life of kindness, of generosity, a life that exhibits the fruit of the spirit, but it also involves a life of truth in which we give the truth of the Gospel to them as we do to anyone else. We don't compromise the Gospel. We don't, we don't water it down. We speak the truth of the cross, and the resurrection, and Christ being the only way of salvation, inviting people to believe and challenging them to come.

God is not finished with Israel. And in verse 12, Paul shows the significance of Jewish salvation on a national scale and its importance for us and why we should be interested in the Jewish people. This is the third stage or the third link on the chain, worldwide blessing. "Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!" This is one of Paul's characteristic "much more" than statements, his way of reasoning from the lesser to the greater in which he proves logically that great blessing will come to the gentiles when the Jews are blessed, when the Jews are saved. Since the gentile world has been blessed by Israel's rejection, through its failure, then Israel's recovery, its fulfillment, its fullness will mean even greater blessing. Israel's fullness is the opposite of its transgression and its failure. That word

failure can also be translated defeat. And Israel, the Jewish nation, the Jewish people, spiritually lie in defeat. They don't have the blessing that were promised to them and they don't have the kingdom that was promised to them. They are in defeat and this, at this point, in this stage of history. Fullness is the opposite of that. So it refers to the nation's success. It refers to the nation's conversion and restoration to national blessing.

Now, there's a division among Christian interpreters, and theologians, and commentators in their thinking about Paul's meaning in this verse. Amillennialists, for example, who believe that there is no future kingdom on the earth, no millennial kingdom, generally deny that there's a future for ethnic Israel. I say generally because not all do, but the vast majority do. Generally, they interpret the Old Testament promises of a kingdom for Israel as being fulfilled spiritually in the church today, so that the church is now spiritual Israel. We have replaced Israel. Israel really doesn't have a significant place in history any more than any other people do.

Pre-millennialists, on the other hand, of which I count myself, those who believe that Christ's second coming is preceding or pre, before the establishment of the millennial kingdom on the earth, the kingdom of 1,000 years. And almost all pre-millennialists believe in a future for ethnic Israel and that the kingdom promises of the Old Testament are fulfilled at that time. Now, many reformed theologians of which I count myself, I don't guess that's any surprise, most Calvinists, or many Calvinists I should say, deny a future for ethnic Israel, but not all do. John Murray, for example, who was professor of systematic theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, a Presbyterian, a consistent Calvinist, not a pre-millennialist, believed in a future for ethnic Israel because he was an exegete, and in his commentary on this passage commenting on verse 12, and Israel's fullness, he wrote, "Nothing less than a restoration of Israel as a people of, to faith, privilege, and blessing can satisfy the terms of this passage." Read through the passage, the terms of it, the argument that Paul gives leave no other choice, but that there is a future for the Jewish people, for ethnic Israel.

Paul is contrasting gentiles and Jews throughout this chapter. A

remnant of Jews, he has said, is being saved presently, but here, in the passage we're studying, verses 11 through 32, Paul is speaking of the rest of those, not the remnant, but the rest. He's discussing the Jewish people as a whole, as a nation, those who have been hardened, and what will happen to them. And Paul's meaning is they will be restored. They have fall, but not into irreversible spiritual ruin. Israel will be recovered and that will mean blessing, not only for the Jews, but blessing for the whole world. And as I said, many reformed people have understood Paul's meaning in just that way.

In the early 19th century, there was a special concern in the Church of Scotland for the conversion of the Jews. Men like Robert Haldane, who wrote an influential commentary on the book of Romans, one that's still read today. In fact, I was reading it last night. And Thomas Chalmers, who was one of the great lights of that age taught that the people of Israel as a body will be brought to faith in the Gospel. The Scottish church established a mission to the Jews and sent Robert Murray M'Cheyne and three others to Palestine to do research to study the state of the Jews there and the opportunities of ministry to them. And then, from there, they went through Eastern Europe and they had great success as they preached the Gospel to Jewish people.

One of the reasons for their great concern for the Jewish people was Romans 11:12 and 15. At the final restoration of Israel will mean the conversion of the whole gentile world. M'Cheyne preached a sermon on to the Jew first and he said that converted Israel will give life to the dead world. They wanted to make their contribution to that end. So this passage and the hope of Israel's future salvation and the blessing that that salvation would bring to the entire gentile world galvanized evangelism in the church. It did with Paul. In verses 13-15, he explains, that was the reason, not the only reason, but a very important reason that he was so devoted to his ministry. He was an apostle to the gentiles. He reminds them of that. It was a great ministry, but his mission to the gentiles can't be separated from a mission to the Jews because through gentile conversions, through gentile salvation, Jews are provoked to jealousy and to faith. And so, he labored hard at his ministry. He gloried in his ministry, he said, for that purpose, in order to save some of

them, he says.

Now, that wouldn't bring about the fullness of Israel. Paul knew that the fullness of Israel, the fulfillment of Israel is yet future. God will bring that about, but he worked hard in anticipation of it and to make his own slight contribution to that end and save some. The greatness of the blessing that will come with Israel's fullness is explained further in verse 15, which elaborates and illustrates what Paul said in verse 12. And again, he applies the logic used in verse 12. He reasons from the lesser to the greater. For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? Since the world was blessed because of Israel's rejection, the world will be blessed far more because of Israel's acceptance. Its salvation will mean life from the dead.

Now, that expression life from the dead has been interpreted a number of different ways. It would seem to suggest the future resurrection of the dead, so that when this occurs, this great awakening among the Jewish people, when there's this great salvation among them that will precede the final events of history with the coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the kingdom that will be established. But since the expression life from the dead is never used of the resurrection literally, it's probably here used figuratively of spiritual blessing. The salvation of the Jews will bring about what John Murray described as an unprecedented quickening of the world, a spiritual resurrection, regeneration as the Gospel spreads worldwide. It is what the Old Testament prophets spoke about when they prophesied an age of universal peace and knowledge. Isaiah spoke of the earth being full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea; Isaiah 11 in verse 9.

That is the future. That's the coming kingdom on the earth when nations hammer their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks, and never again learn war. That is the kingdom to come. That's the goal of history. History's not meaningless. History's not directionless. History is moving toward that great day. That is the goal of history. Israel's fullness, its future faith and restoration, will result in worldwide blessing that will enrich gentiles in unimaginable ways.

In verse 16, Paul confirms this. He confirms the certainty of Israel's future salvation with two illustrations. One taken from the kitchen and the other taken from the orchard. "If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too." Those are two illustrations that are parallel. The first, fruits and the root represent the same thing, and the lump and the branches represent the same thing, but we might wonder, what in the world do they represent? Well, Paul is proving his point from scripture and the first illustration of the dough or the lump is taken from Numbers 15:17-21 where God commanded that when Israel entered the land, at the time of the harvest, they were to offer to him the first fruits of the flour or the grain that they used in baking bread.

So they were to give him the first part, the first fruits, and in doing that, that would consecrate everything that they had. That would make holy the rest of the flour, the rest of the dough for breaking, for baking. And that illustrates Israel being consecrated to God. Israel is the lump. Israel is the tree. The first fruits and the root represent the Patriarchs, particularly probably Abraham since in verse 27 Paul states that Israel is loved, still loved by God because of the fathers, because of the Patriarchs, because of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, particularly Abraham.

So the idea is as a tree is benefited by its root, Israel is benefited by its root, Abraham. He is the first fruits of the people, the first, the father of the Jewish people, and they have been consecrated to God just as the lump is consecrated by the first fruits. The promise God gave to Abraham, the promises that He gave to Abraham guarantee that Israel has been set apart to God. He has a special relationship with Israel. He foreknew them as Paul said earlier and they will ultimately be blessed with salvation.

So the first fruits and the root guarantee a future for Israel, guarantee that the nation will be spiritually renewed and recovered. Paul will explain that further in verses 23 and 24, but first, he develops the illustration of the tree in verses 17 through 22 in order to correct gentile Christians and warn them against pride over their new position with God. For all of their history, they've been outside the commonwealth of Israel. They've been outside the

covenants. Now they're inside and now they're increasing. And there was evidently in Rome and perhaps throughout the gentile world, and I think this is probably characteristically true, that as they grew to be the majority, they had pride in themselves. And so, Paul writes now to correct that. They are like branches that have been grafted into a tree. They don't naturally belong there. So they have no basis for boasting or feeling superior to the Jews who have been broken off of that tree.

Verse 17, "But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches." This parable of the olive tree is the story of God dealing with Israel and the tragedy of its present rejection and the glory of the inclusion of the gentiles into the blessings of salvation. It's similar to what happens in an orchard when a tree is pruned, and then, branches are grafted into it from another tree in order to make the tree that's been pruned more fruitful.

The olive tree is very common around the Mediterranean. There are olive orchards everywhere and some of them are very old. Some of them are older than 1,000 years. Wild olive trees also grow there and they are known for being very unproductive. And so, what farmers would do is they would graft the chutes or the branches of a cultivated olive tree into the wild olive tree in order to invigorate the wild olive tree and make it productive. Now, that's the normal process, to take the chute, the scion of a cultivated tree and put it into a wild tree, but what Paul describes here is the reverse of that procedure. It's the wild that's grafted into the cultivated.

So Paul has been accused of mixing things up, of being, and being ridiculed as a city dweller who doesn't understand what went on in the country and in the orchard. Paul understood. He knew what he was talking about. In fact, there was evidence that on rare occasions the kind of grafting that he describes did happen, but most likely, Paul deliberately reversed the process to make a point. He wasn't giving a lesson on farming. He was explaining history and giving a lesson in theology with an emphasis on grace.

The point is to show that branches that didn't belong in the natural tree

were put there contrary to nature, the very opposite of what one would expect to happen occurred. That's grace. That's what the gentiles received. And from that, Paul gives two lessons. First, the first lesson is from the broken off branches, which offer a warning to the gentiles in verses 17 through 22 not to be presumptuous about their position, not to be proud of who they are. The second is from the grafted in branches, which offers a promise of hope in verses 23 and 24 to Jewish unbelievers, to the nation. The warning begins in verse 17 where Paul reminds gentiles of their undeserved, unmerited blessing. They are unnatural branches. They are wild branches who were put in with the natural branches and made partakers with them of the rich root of the olive tree. The olive tree is a symbol in the Old Testament of the nation Israel. Jeremiah 11 in verse 16 speaks of Israel a green olive tree. The rich root, as we've seen, is Abraham. It is the covenant that was made with Abraham, the promises of that covenant. It's the source of the nation Israel. But by God's grace, contrary to nature, gentiles have been made partakers of that rich root. They have been made partakers of the Abrahamic covenant whose blessings are obtained through faith and faith alone.

So the people of God are not restricted to one nation, but rather, the people of God, the olive tree has not been expanded to included both Jews and gentiles, all kinds of people, all families of the earth, but predominantly now it is gentile. Now, gentiles don't stop being gentiles when they've been grafted into the tree, and believing Jews don't stop being Jews. Titus was still a gentile who Paul had to circumcise or didn't circumcise, I should say, for a particular point to make. And Paul continued to be a Jew. In fact, he continued to refer to himself as a Hebrew of the Hebrews, but both the Jew and the gentile are part of the same tree. They are part of the one people of God, sharing the same promises, having the same destiny, which is a glorious kingdom to come. It is a position of great privilege, a position of unexpressable, unimagined blessing, but not one for boasting.

You can't boast about grace and Paul warns against doing that in verse 18. Do not be arrogant toward the branches, but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you.

Branches don't sustain themselves; they are dependent on the root. And gentile believers are dependent on the promises of Abraham. There is a Jewish heritage to the Christian faith. So gentile believers have no basis for arrogance towards the Jews. We are in some ways indebted to the Jewish people.

As Dr. Johnson wrote in his sermon on this context, the text is a blow to anti-Semitism. There's no place for that in the church, but there may have been that in the Church of Rome, at least evidently some emerging feelings of superiority and in rhetorical style Paul gives the gentile reply in verse 19. "You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.' Quite right," he says, but "they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, buy fear." In other words, gentiles have a privileged position through faith, not by works, not by anything that we have done, not by any merit of our own, but through faith, by means of what we simply receive as a gift from God. It's all because of grace, because of God's unmerited favor. There's no boasting. There can be no boasting in this. Israel failed through unbelief, not because they were inferior to the gentiles or because God loved gentiles more than Jews. Israel is an object lesson for the church, which should cause Christians as we reflect upon Israel and what happened to the nation should cause Christians to be sober about their faith.

In verse 21, Paul gives the reason for that, the reason we should to be presumptuous about who we are. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. In other words, since God broke off Israel, the original covenant people, the branches who naturally belong to the root, to Abraham, then he won't spare us if we fail too with unbelief. And if Israel, the natural branches, if those people could fall into unbelief, then we should be very fearful, and we should consider who we are and how weak we are, and be fearful of unbelief also. The point is don't be presumptuous about grace. Don't presume upon election. It's a warning to be humble. It's a warning to persevere in the faith, to not be idle, to not be indifferent. Rather, to be earnest about our faith as the author of Hebrews puts it to run the race

and to run it with great diligence concentrating on the author and perfecter of faith, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Be diligent to keep your eyes on Him. All of that's bound up in Paul's exhortation here. He continues in verse 22. "Behold then the kindness and severity of God." Excuse me. "Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who feel, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. God's kindness or his goodness is His grace. He's kind to us beyond anything we deserve. He is forgiving. He grafts in wild branches. He saves gentiles who deserve judgment. The words "Behold then the kindness of God" remind me of a great hymn that was written by Bernard of Clairvaux. I think we might've sung it last week; *Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee*. And there's that line, "O hope of every contrite heart, o joy of all the meek, to those who fall how kind thou art, how good to those who seek." The kindness of God is staggering. The grace of god is staggering.

We should reflect upon that. We should, we should understand what that goodness, that kindness, that grace is, but we should remember also God's severity. We must continue in His kindness, Paul says. We must continue in faith to the end. That's a principle of the New Testament. It is the perseverance of the saints, which means the perseverance in faith continuing to believe. Now, Paul wasn't – his warning here doesn't suggest that a person's salvation can be lost. Paul made the impossibility of that very clear in Romans 8:38 and 39. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ; nothing. He gives all kinds of examples; heights, or depths, or whatever, you name it, it cannot separate us from the love of Christ.

Paul's warning though, is against presumption and that leads to apostasy, falling away of those who are not truly believers. True believers do not fall away because they continue in faith and this is one of the means by which they continue in faith. True believers fear. They heed the warnings that are given, and as a result, the continue in faith. This is a means by which God provokes us on and keeps us in, keeps us believing, but ultimately, of course, it's by His grace that He keeps us that way.

The people who think that they are better than unbelieving Jews, who think that they have merit with God and deserve His kindness are on dangerous ground. The Jews were cut off because of unbelief. It is only by grace through faith that a person is saved. When people forget God's grace, when they begin to think that they have merit, that's when they fall into unbelief. Neglecting grace is, neglecting the grace of God is the path to apostasy. So Paul warns gentile Christians, don't be arrogant. Don't be presumptuous. You are saved and you are kept in the olive tree by the grace of God alone.

Now, following the warning, Paul gives a promise of hope for Israel. In verse 23, he shows that Israel's restoration is possible. And then, in verse 24, he shows that it is probable. Verse 23, "And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again." Nothing's too difficult for God. He does what is humanly impossible, and since unbelief is what separates Jews from salvation, God can remove that unbelief and He can give faith. Faith is His gift to give and He does.

So Israel's future salvation is certainly possible; God can do that. Paul adds that it's also probable because if God grafted in wild gentile branches, then surely he will do the same with the natural branches. Verse 24, "For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?" If God can save gentiles, then He can certainly save Jews. If God can give faith to the gentile, then certainly He can give faith to the Jews. In fact, since He has saved gentiles, it is more likely that He will save Israel. The tree is their tree. The root is their root. The promises made to Abraham are their promises, and their promises still stand. They have not been revoked.

So God can graft them back into the olive tree and God will graft them back into the olive tree, as Paul says in verse 26, "All Israel will be saved." There is a future for Israel, not because Israel deserves it. Jews and gentiles alike are equally undeserving and equally unable. It's all because of grace. God made promises to the nation though. They're unconditional promises and

God keeps His word. Some day Israel will be grafted back into the people of God. That's the chain of blessing.

Jewish rejection led to gentile inclusion, which will ultimately be followed by Jewish restoration and worldwide blessing. Hegel couldn't figure out the place of the Jew in history. It was an enigma to him, but Paul explains it. History is moving towards Israel's restoration. That's the goal. It will be a glorious age, the kingdom age. Jesus used a rare Greek word to describe it in Matthew 19:28, the Palingenesis, the regeneration when the world is born again; reborn. But God's work of regeneration is going on now as well.

In fact, it's going on in a way that is glorious beyond our imagination. By God's grace, people are being born again, lives are being changed. It is life from the dead. God turns tragedy into triumph. Lives that were ruined by sin are changed. And by God's grace, He brings order out of chaos. He brings blessing out of ruin. He puts lives and families back together. That's what God is doing today. That's what God is doing in your life as a Christian. He is sanctifying you. He is changing you. He's blessing you. And that is for everyone who believes and who is placed in Jesus Christ. All who trust in Christ as the one who died for their sins are forgiven and given eternal life. They become heirs of the kingdom to come, this regeneration of the world.

So if you're here without Christ, if you've not believed in Him, that promise is for you. This is about a hope for Israel, the unbelieving Jew, but the hope is for the unbelieving gentile as well, whoever you are, whatever your background, whatever your spiritual condition, whatever your moral condition, whatever it might be, it is for you who believe, everyone who believes is brought into salvation. So if you're here without Christ, if you lack the hope of eternal life, then look to Jesus Christ, trust in Him, as God's son and our Savior, the one who died in our place and bore the penalty for us, believe in Him and enter into life everlasting. May God help you to do that. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your grace and your goodness. We see it in how You have dealt with the gentiles, wild branches grafted in to

a tree that was not their own, made partakers of a root that is rich, but was not our own, and we see it in the way that you are going to deal with the nation. You're going to cause them to be born again. You're going to bring the nation Israel back to Yourself, and then, great glory will fill the earth. We thank You for that. We look forward to that day. It will be the day of our Lord's return when we will see Him face to face. So, Father, we pray that You'd hasten that day and we pray that we'd be diligent servants of Yours in the meantime. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.