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A Remnant by Grace

Romans 11.1-6

Series: The Pure Gospel

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The Village Church

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I. Introduction

- A. My favorite class upon entering the Jr.-Sr. high school I attended was ... gym class!
- B. Now, I'm fully aware that gym class was not everyone's favorite
 - 1. Not everyone was athletically inclined or gifted
 - 2. As a matter of fact, it's likely that a majority of students could take or leave it
 - a. And a significant number abhorred the class
- C. There are likely some in this room who remember those days when a team sport was the unit, and teams were selected to play in the class league
 - 1. The day of team selection was dreaded for some
 - a. The way it often happened is that captains were chosen, usually by the teacher
 - b. And then the captains would select their teams one by one
 - c. They would, of course, select the most athletically gifted first
 - d. And as the selection process wound down, there were the leftovers
 - e. No captain wanted them on their team
 - f. But sooner or later, they were chosen
 - g. And to be one of the last two or three chosen was one of the greatest humiliations of one's school experience
- D. Now, in this day and age, physical education teachers know better ways to select teams in order to avoid those times of public humiliation
 - 1. Sometimes the teams were selected randomly before the unit begins
 - 2. Or at other times the selection process would take place privately, and then after the teams were selected, then the captains would be assigned to the team
 - 3. Those, and other ways of selecting teams are more humane and spare the so-called "leftovers" of the embarrassment of being the last to be picked
- E. But that's not the way my physical education teacher did it – he had another way to avoid the embarrassment experienced by the "leftovers"
 - 1. Let's take flag football, for instance
 - 2. If there were, say, six teams in the league, my teacher, Coach Rimmey was his name, would select five captains
 - a. Five youngsters who were the more athletically capable students
 - b. And then he, Coach Rimmey, would be the sixth captain

3. Then, when the selection process took place, it started like you'd expect, with the captains picking the most gifted athletes for their teams
 - a. But when it was time for Coach to pick a player for his team, he would purposefully pick someone who would be considered a leftover
 - b. So by the time the end of the selection process was over, all the leftovers had already been picked and were included on Coach Rimmey's team
- F. Now, don't assume Coach was completely altruistic in this process
 1. In the case of flag football, there were probably seven or eight players on each team
 2. And the rules were such that every player, including linemen, were eligible to catch passes
 3. So every time Coach Rimmey's team got the ball, the center would hike the ball to coach – who always was the quarterback
 - a. And after the linemen blocked for the requisite three seconds or so, he had them drift down field about five yards
 - b. And every time one of them was open to catch a pass
 4. There were never any long passes
 - a. But consistently Rimmey's Remnants would move down the field picking up first downs
 - b. Eventually scoring touchdowns
 5. So that in the final analysis, Rimmey's Remnants always won!
- G. Which was really frustrating for me and others like me
 1. We were never part of the leftovers
 - a. We never belonged to Rimmey's Remnants
- H. But in a unique way, what Coach Rimmey did reminds me of what God does
 1. **1 Corinthians 1:27–29** (ESV) —
 - a. 27 ... God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;
 - b. 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,
 - c. 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.
- I. You cannot begin to understand the ways of God without understanding God's glorious use of the remnant

II. **The Driving Question**

- A. We continue this morning our study of Romans in a series entitled The Pure Gospel
 1. We are in the midst of an important section of the gospel in which Paul is dealing with the question of Jewish unbelief
 - a. Chapters 9, 10 and 11 address the issue of why, having seen the life and ministry of Jesus
 - b. Having witnessed his miracles and his teaching
 - c. And having been aware of the passion of the Christ, His arrest by the Jewish authorities

- d. And His crucifixion at the hands of the Romans
 - e. But then of hearing through eye witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, and His ascension into heaven
 - 2. Why, then, have most of Paul's Jewish compatriots not believed in Him?
- B. You'll recall last week that this issue was extremely disconcerting for Paul
 - 1. It led to a transition from the end of Chapter 8 – that glorious chapter which concludes with that incredible ode to victory...
 - 2. **Romans 8:38–39** (ESV) —
 - a. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,
 - b. 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 - 3. But then, in the very next breath, Paul finds himself overcome with sadness and depression
 - 4. **Romans 9:2–3** (ESV) —
 - a. 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.
 - b. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.
 - 5. Last week we considered Paul's heartbreak
 - a. His heartbreak over the fact that the vast majority of his Jewish kinsmen, his own family as it were
 - b. Those who were natural-born Israelites, descendants of Jacob
 - c. Who had experienced the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the law, the worship and the promises
 - d. Indeed – Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, had come from their very stock
- C. Paul is heartbroken, to be sure, over the unbelief of his kinsmen
 - 1. But what occupies his thoughts even more than that is the question of the promises of God
 - 2. If the Jewish people are not saved, what does that do to the promises of God?
 - a. Is God faithful to fulfill his promises?
 - b. Or has God failed to live up to His covenant commitments?
- D. Paul expresses this issue back in Chapter 9 this way:
 - 1. **Romans 9:6** (ESV) —
 - a. 6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. ...
 - 2. That question is what drives Paul through these three chapters
 - a. And beginning in Chapter 9 he lays out multiple reasons why that could never be the case
 - b. Why God is, in fact, must be, faithful to fulfill His promises
 - 3. And in every case he appeals to the Jewish scriptures to support his case
- E. Here are his arguments in these chapters so far:
 - 1. In Chapter 9 he focuses on the sovereignty of God in salvation

- a. And he teaches that all whom God has elected to salvation will be saved
- 2. He continues in Chapter 9 to show through the scriptures that God had revealed that not all Israel would be saved and that some Gentiles would be
- 3. Then, as Chapter 10 opens, he shows through the scriptures that the failure of Jews to believe was their own fault, and not God's
 - a. This chapter saw the prominent role of human responsibility in God's plan of salvation
 - b. And demonstrated the absolute necessity of missions and evangelism in bringing people to saving faith
- F. And now, as Chapter 11 opens, Paul continues his argument
 - 1. But the Driving Question is still the same as it was back at the beginning of Chapter 9
 - 2. Remember how Chapter 9 opened:
 - a. "But it is not as though the word of God has failed..." (Romans 9.6)
 - 3. Now, in Chapter 11, Paul expresses it a little differently
 - a. But it's the same question
 - 4. Romans 11:1 (ESV) —
 - a. I I ask, then, has God rejected his people?
- G. It's the same question, isn't it?
 - 1. Has the word of God failed?
 - a. If the Jewish people on the whole have failed to believe in Messiah Jesus, does that mean that the promises of God in the word of God have failed?
 - 2. In other words, has God rejected his people?
 - 3. So in this passage, Paul adds to his already substantial argument demonstrating that God's word is sure and can be trusted

III. The Emphatic Answer

- A. His emphatic answer to that question, "has God rejected his people?", is simple
 - 1. Romans 11:1 (ESV) —
 - a. I I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!
 - 2. "By no means!" is the most emphatic negative answer the Greeks knew how to give
- B. And the reason for dealing with this question, and the power of Paul's reply, is because of what the Hebrew scriptures teach
 - 1. 1 Samuel 12:22 (ESV) —
 - a. 22 For the LORD will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself.
 - 2. What an expansive promise!
 - a. God will not forsake His people
 - b. Why? Because His people are such fine, upstanding and righteous citizens?

- c. No! But God won't forsake His people for His own name's sake
 - d. Indeed, for His own pleasure!
- 3. Even the Psalms declare this truth
- 4. **Psalm 94:14** (ESV) —
 - a. 14 For the LORD will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage...
- 5. And the prophets
- 6. **Jeremiah 31:37** (ESV) —
 - a. 37 Thus says the LORD: "If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the LORD."
- 7. According to Jeremiah (God through Jeremiah), you'd have to measure the expanse of the heavens and the foundations of the earth before God would cast off Israel
 - a. In spite of all the iniquity they have committed
- C. Wow! What extravagant promises!
 - 1. So what does Paul say now to affirm that the Word of God has not failed, that God has not rejected His people?
 - 2. He offers two cases as proof that God's word is faithful

IV. **Case #1 – The True Israelite Believer**

- A. Paul's first case is really quite simple, but yet is steeped in meaning
 - 1. First, the simple
- B. **Romans 11:1** (ESV) —
 - 1. I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means!
 - 2. **For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.**
- C. "Has God rejected his people? By no means!"
 - 1. Why?
 - a. Because I'm a Jew – and He saved me!
 - 2. In other words, if God has saved one Israelite, He has fulfilled His promise!
 - 3. Now, God has saved many more than just one, than just Paul
 - a. He has saved all the original apostles, except for Judas Iscariot
 - b. And they are all Jews
 - 4. Not only that, but on the day of Pentecost God saved 3,000
 - a. And most, if not all, of them were Jews gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost
 - 5. And the church in Jerusalem continued to grow to more than 5,000
 - a. Most, if not all, of those were Jews
- D. But Paul says, God's word has not failed; He has not rejected His people
 - 1. Because I'm Jewish!
 - a. And He saved me
 - b. And if He saved one, He fulfills His word
- E. Now Paul's answer in this first case is quite emphatic for another reason

1. For how he identifies himself
 2. "I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin"
- F. Those are significant credentials for several reasons
1. First, "I myself am an Israelite"
 2. Now there are several ways the Jewish people were referred to in those days
 - a. Hebrew – most likely comes from the ancestor Eber back in Genesis 10
 - b. But this designation would actually apply to a wider group of people than the people Paul has in mind
 - c. Jew – refers to those who belong to Judah
 - d. This is a more restrictive designation, referring to those descended from the fourth son of Jacob through Leah
 - e. Though Judah was the most prominent of the twelve tribes, it still didn't encompass the entire body
 - f. But the term Israelite – refers to Israel – the name God gave to Jacob when He wrestled with Jacob at the brook Jabbok, and where he received God's blessing
 - g. So Israel is the covenant designation for an true Israelite
 - h. And since the issue is, is God faithful to His covenant promises? Paul says he is, in fact, a true covenant descendant
 3. Then, Paul says he is a "descendant of Abraham"
 - a. This is even more critical, especially in light of what Paul has been saying all along
 - b. Remember, all the way back in Romans 9 Paul has argued that a true descendant of Abraham is an Israelite by faith
 - c. Because Abraham believed God, and God credited it to him as righteousness
 - d. So the true child of Abraham is a child of faith
 4. And finally, Paul says he is of the tribe of Benjamin
 - a. Now, Benjamin was one of small tribes in Israel
 - b. But it's significance is greater than its numbers
 - c. For remember, Benjamin was the only one of the twelve sons of Jacob who was born in the promised land
 - d. And not only that, but when the kingdom divided after Solomon, Benjamin was the only tribe to stay with Judah to comprise the southern kingdom
 - e. In fact, Jerusalem was located within the confines of the territory of Benjamin
 - f. So Benjamin was the host for the temple and its worship
- G. So, the argument from Case #1 is simple, yet profound
1. Paul himself is a Jew
 - a. And if God saved one Jew, He has not rejected His people
 2. And more than that, Paul's credentials as a Jew are impeccable

- a. An Israelite – included in the covenant
- b. A descendant of Abraham – a true child of the promise
- c. And of the tribe of Benjamin – a tribe faithful to the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem

V. **Case #2 – The Surprising Remnant**

- A. The second case Paul uses to affirm that God does not reject His people takes his first case to the next level
 - 1. And brings to mind where we began – with a remnant
- B. **Romans 11:2–5 (ESV) —**
 - 1. 2 **God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.**
 - 2. **Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel?**
 - 3. 3 **“Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.”**
 - 4. 4 **But what is God’s reply to him? “I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”**
 - 5. 5 **So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.**
- C. Once again, the scripture is the source of the issue of the remnant
 - 1. It’s a passage we’ll be looking at this evening in the series In the Days of Elijah
 - 2. But essentially, according to the scriptures, while, as Paul earlier observed, not all Israel is Israel, and not everyone who is physically descended from Israel is a true Israelite
 - a. Nevertheless, God has always had a remnant that He has saved

VI. **The Story**

- A. So, let’s look at the story that Paul uses to illustrate this great truth
 - 1. We find it in **1 Kings 18 and 19**
- B. Elijah had challenged the priests of Baal to sacrifice contest
 - 1. In the northern kingdom, under King Ahab, Jezebel being his wicked consort, the nation was deeply steeped in idolatry
 - 2. Baal was the male deity; Asherah was the female
 - 3. So Elijah approached Ahab to set up the contest
 - a. Ahab figure the odds were on his side
 - b. After all, there were 450 prophets of Baal; only one of Yahweh (Elijah)
 - 4. So everyone gathered on Mt. Carmel
 - 5. The idea was that altars would be constructed and the true God – Yahweh or Baal – would be the one who would devour the altar with flame
- C. The prophets of Baal went first
 - 1. They built their altar
 - 2. They cried out to Baal
 - 3. They did it with more passion that can be imagined
 - 4. And nothing happened

5. So they upped their game, got ecstatic in the gyrations, even cutting themselves to entice Baal to take the offering
6. All the while Elijah mocked the prophets of Baal
7. “What’s the matter? Maybe Baal is on a journey... or he’s asleep and needs to be awakened – why don’t you call louder?”
 - a. “Or maybe he’s relieving himself”
8. But still, nothing happens
- D. Then it becomes Elijah’s turn
 1. And he stacks the deck against himself
 - a. Pours water over and around the sacrifice three times
 2. And offers a simple prayer, asking God to answer and take the sacrifice
 3. And God does it!
 - a. The first of the LORD falls and consumes the offering, even licking up the water in the trenches that were filled around the altar
- E. So the people observing are convinced
 1. Under Elijah’s direction they seize the prophets of Baal, take them to the brook Kidron, and execute them
- F. But oddly, after all this, word gets back to Jezebel
 1. She’s fit to be tied
 - a. Promises to kill Elijah the first chance she gets
 2. So Elijah high tails it out of there and heads south to the wilderness
 - a. And plunges into a spiritual depression
- G. He complains to God
 1. **1 Kings 19:14** (ESV) —
 - a. 14 He said, “I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away.”
 2. “I’m the only one left. Just kill me Lord. I’m done.”
- H. But God says to Elijah, “I’m not done with you”
 1. He gives Elijah another job to do
 2. And then He tells him...
 3. **1 Kings 19:18** (ESV) —
 - a. 18 “Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”
- I. “You’re not alone, Elijah. It seems like you’re all by yourself in this. You’re not. I have kept 7,000 who have not bowed the knee in idolatry.”
 1. So Paul says,
 2. **Romans 11:5** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 **So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.**
- J. All through the scriptures, there have been, among those who were natural-born descendants of Israel, some who have believed and some who haven’t
 1. And even in the darkest of times, the times of greatest apostasy among the Jewish people, God has had a remnant
 2. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew

3. The remnant was always God's modus operandi
 - a. The ways of God takes the outcasts, the leftovers, the weak, the least of these
 - b. And through the remnant, He has saved a people for Himself
- K. Reject His people?
 1. Never!
 2. Has His word failed?
 - a. Of course not!
 3. The remnant was always His plan
 - a. And it is evident all through the Hebrew scriptures
 - b. Plain and evident to any Jew who would listen

VII. The Choice

- A. Two things need to be mentioned
 1. The driver, the initiator, the agent for all this is God
- B. Romans 11:4-5 (ESV) —
 1. 4 But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."
 2. 5 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.
- C. The reason why there is a remnant is God
 1. It's not some random group of Jewish people who just happened to keep believing
 - a. No! "I have kept for myself"
 - b. God has been keeping the remnant
- D. And v 5 – "chosen" by grace
 1. The remnant is chosen
 - a. Just like my Coach Rimmey picked who he wanted from the leftovers
- E. But see this:
 1. The example is Elijah
 - a. And God kept for Himself 7,000 as a remnant
 2. But Paul says, "So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace"
 3. In Paul's day, not just in the OT story of Elijah, God works through the remnant
 - a. He has chosen those of the remnant in Paul's day
 - b. Jewish people who believe
 - c. And there are more than one or two
 - d. There are many, many Jewish people – natural descendants of Israel – who are believers in Messiah Jesus!
 - e. More and more all the time!
 4. Because even today, God has His remnant
- F. The remnant is His choice

VIII. The Principle

- A. Why?
 - 1. What's the principle?
 - 2. Well, you already know it
 - a. We've seen it in spades in Romans
- B. The principle is **Grace!**
- C. **Romans 11:5–6** (ESV) —
 - 1. 5 **So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.**
 - 2. 6 **But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.**
- D. Grace – the unmerited favor of God
 - 1. And if you are Jewish by birth, and you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior
 - a. It is because you are chosen by God
 - b. It is because you are chosen by grace, not in anything in yourself
 - c. You're a leftover, after all!
 - 2. But God loves the leftover, the remnant!
 - 3. And if you are a Gentile by birth, and you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior
 - a. It is because you too are chosen by God
 - b. Chose by grace, not because of anything goodness or righteousness in yourself, for you have none!
 - c. You too are a leftover!
 - 4. But God loves the leftover, the remnant!
 - a. And He loves you!
- E. None of that changes the issue of responsibility
 - 1. Everyone must call on the name of the Lord to be saved
 - a. There is no room for presumption
 - b. You cannot presume on your Jewishness
 - c. Just as you cannot presume on your church membership or your parent's faith
 - 2. And you cannot call on Him of whom you have never heard
 - a. And you cannot hear unless someone preaches to you
 - b. And you cannot have a preacher unless they are sent
- F. The responsibility of the person has no contradiction with God's loving and sovereign choice
 - 1. His choice by grace
 - 2. His choice of the remnant by grace
 - 3. Because God's ways – which are not our ways – always involves the remnant
- G. **1 Corinthians 1:27–29** (ESV) —
 - 1. 27 ... God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;
 - 2. 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,
 - 3. 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.