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Hope for the Stumbling

Romans 11.7-12

Series: The Pure Gospel

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The Village Church

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I. Introduction

- A. Not long after I came we began working through a strategic planning process
 - 1. Long story short – the first, and most important, outcome of that process was the mission statement of The Village Church
 - 2. **We are building a community of forgiveness, purpose and hope in Jesus Christ.**
- B. The core of that mission statement – forgiveness, purpose, and hope – are strikingly relevant to us and our community (which is made up mostly of seniors)
- C. **Forgiveness**, because we discovered that many in our community needed to have a saving relationship with God through Christ
 - 1. That even after attending church for perhaps a lifetime, many still believe that one is saved through good works
 - 2. But as we have seen repeatedly through our study of Romans, **Romans 3:20** (ESV) —
 - a. 20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight...
 - 3. But instead, **Romans 3:23–25** (ESV) —
 - a. 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
 - b. 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,
 - c. 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith...
 - 4. For being justified before God, being declared not guilty and forgiven by God, happens, not by works of the Law which we've all transgressed, but by grace through faith in Jesus
 - 5. So we believe we need to proclaim the message of forgiveness by grace through faith
 - a. And that many in our community – even within the church – need to hear that message
 - 6. We also discovered in our assessment that forgiveness was needed by many in our community in a horizontal level – that is, between family members, loved ones, even friends (or even enemies!)
 - a. That reconciliation was a chief concern in our community
 - b. That we needed to be, **not just a forgiven community, but a forgiving community**

- D. **Purpose** is the second of the core virtues
1. This is perhaps the most easily recognizable of the three as we consider what it means to be in a retirement community
 2. What used to give many of us purpose is now in our rear-view mirror
 - a. And we wonder, what is my purpose now?
 3. Shell Point does a wonderful job of marketing the plethora of possible activities and amenities that are available in our community
 - a. But that doesn't answer the question, "Why am I here? Who am I now?"
 4. And so, in The Village Church, we proposed the question, "What is my purpose now in light of Jesus Christ?"
- E. And finally, **Hope** is the last of the core virtues
1. As a senior community, we are coming down the homestretch of life
 - a. As we approach that final threshold, we will approach it with fear of the judgment or of the unknown?
 - b. Or will we approach it with the expectation of being in the presence of our beloved Savior?
 2. The scriptures teach that our only hope in life and death is in relationship with Jesus Christ
 3. As the first question in the Heidelberg Catechism puts it:
 - a. Q. What is your only comfort in life and death?
 - b. A. What I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.
 4. So, like forgiveness and purpose, hope is only found in relation to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ
- F. What is interesting about those three virtues, is that they are not pertinent only to a senior community, or even this senior community
1. Those three virtues show up repeatedly throughout the scriptures
 - a. They are core values in the Word of God, pretty much from beginning to end
 2. And it doesn't much matter what issue the scriptures are addressing, you find forgiveness, purpose and hope jumping out the pages of the Bible when you are sensitized to look for them
 3. Such is the case with our text this morning
- G. We are in Chapter 11 of Romans, the third chapter in a section dealing with Paul's exposition of how the gospel, the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, relates to the people of Israel, Paul's own kinsmen
1. In these chapters Paul is wrestling with the overriding issue of why so many of those in Israel, God's chosen nation, have not trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior
 2. In Chapter 9 he shows how not all of those who are physically descended from Israel are true, believing Israel
 - a. That those who are the true Israel of God are those who are such by faith – as was Abraham

3. He also shows in that chapter that all of those who are elect, chosen by God, for salvation, are saved
 - a. So Paul emphasizes in Chapter 9 the sovereignty of God in salvation
 - b. And that God's promises have not failed because the OT, the Hebrew Bible itself, testifies to this very distinction
 4. Then in Chapter 10 Paul concentrates on the human responsibility side of salvation
 - a. And teaches that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord in faith will be saved
 - b. And that "calling on the name of the Lord" requires faith in Jesus Christ
 - c. Which in turn requires knowing who Christ is
 - d. Which in turn requires someone preaching Christ to them
 - e. Which in turn requires the people of God, the church, sending preachers
 5. In so doing, Paul shows that his own kinsmen, the Jews, who do not believe in Jesus, once they have heard about Him, are responsible for their own unbelief
 6. And finally, in Chapter 11, Paul begins to unravel the nature of Israel's sin
 - a. How they have come to the place of unbelief
 - b. And why Jewish unbelief in Jesus figures into God's plan of redemption
- H. That's where we are in our text today
1. And as we work through this challenging text, we will see how forgiveness, purpose and hope, once again, come to define who we are as the people of God
- I. **Romans 11:7–12** (ESV) —
1. 7 What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened,
 2. 8 as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day."
 3. 9 And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them;
 4. 10 let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever."
 5. 11 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.
 6. 12 Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!

II. **The Teacher's Review**

- A. The first thing we see in our text is something we have come to expect from the great teacher
 - 1. And that is, a concise review of what he's been teaching in these three chapters
 - 2. Remember, the essence of his teaching
 - a. That Israel is responsible for its unbelief
 - b. That God has sovereignly elected those who would be saved
 - c. And that those two truths stand without contradiction in scripture
 - 3. So here is Paul's succinct summary of what he has taught us so far
- B. **Romans 11:7** (ESV) —
 - 1. 7 **What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking.**
 - 2. **The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened...**
- C. You'll recall that the reason Israel failed to obtain salvation which it was seeking was that they sought it as if it were by works
 - 1. **Romans 9:31–33** (ESV) —
 - a. 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.
 - b. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.
 - c. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,
 - d. 33 as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."
 - 2. So, Paul says in this succinct summary, "Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking"
 - a. For, as he taught earlier, they pursued it as if it were based on works
 - b. **But salvation is by grace through faith**
- D. In fact, in the immediately preceding verse, Paul says very much the same thing
 - 1. **Romans 11:6** (ESV) —
 - a. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.
- E. Then, in Paul's summary, he says "the elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened"
 - 1. Here Paul recounts two doctrines which he had explained earlier
 - a. **The doctrine of election**
 - b. And **The doctrine of reprobation**
 - 2. Remember back in Chapter 9 when Paul speaks about election
 - 3. He speak of God's choice of Jacob over Esau
 - a. Two twins, born of the same parents at the same time
 - b. Before they had done anything good or bad
 - c. Were chosen, one over the other
 - 4. **Romans 9:11** (ESV) —

- a. 11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—
 - 5. And then he quotes Exodus 33.19 to affirm this biblical truth
 - 6. **Romans 9:15** (ESV) —
 - a. 15 For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”
- F. Now I realize that is hard to hear
 - 1. That God chooses, not based on what we do, or will do, but based on the counsel of His own will which is unknown to us
 - 2. But remember, we have two possible ways in which God may deal with us
 - a. It’s either **by justice or by mercy** or grace
 - b. If you want God to make His choice on the basis of justice, then we’re all toast
 - c. For none of us has been able to meet God’s standard of holiness
 - d. On the other hand, God, in Jesus Christ, has mercy on all those who will call on Him to be saved
 - e. He has mercy on us sinners
 - f. So grace is the only possible means by which anyone is saved
 - 3. That why Paul says in **Romans 11.6** “... if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace”
 - a. And then, in our text, the next verse, he says, **Romans 11.7** “the elect obtained it”
 - 4. Election and grace are two words for the same act of God
- G. Now, that’s election, but our text also raises the issue of its opposite
 - 1. **The doctrine of reprobation**
 - 2. The doctrine of reprobation is what happens to those who are not elect
 - a. That’s kind of the elephant in the room, when we talk about election, isn’t it?
 - b. We don’t really want to think about it
 - c. I don’t really want to think about it
 - d. For the more I think about it, the more it brings me into Paul’s frame of mind that has provoked this whole discussion
 - e. “Great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart”
 - 3. But the only reason I have to consider it is that it is in the Bible
 - 4. **Romans 11:7** (ESV) —
 - a. 7 What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking.
 - b. The elect obtained it, **but the rest were hardened...**
- H. Now, we’ve heard that before, haven’t we
 - 1. Back in Chapter 9
 - 2. **Romans 9:17–18** (ESV) —
 - a. 17 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”

- b. 18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.
- I. Election and reprobation
 - 1. Two biblical doctrines
 - a. Taught in the scriptures – OT and NT
 - 2. And there cannot be one without the other
 - 3. They are like Newton's Third Law of Motion
 - a. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction
 - 4. If some are elected to salvation, what happens to those who are not?
 - a. That's what we don't want to think about
 - b. But the Bible doesn't give us that option
- J. But here's the point of v. 7
 - 1. In this statement, Paul summarizes what he has been teaching us all along
 - a. About personal responsibility for believing
 - b. About election and grace
 - c. And about reprobation
 - 2. **Romans 11:7 (ESV) —**
 - a. 7 What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking.
 - b. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened...

III. **Reprobation Explained**

- A. Now, this is heavy stuff
 - 1. But remember – this is serious business
 - a. This is the salvation of your souls that is at stake
 - b. And Paul is driven by his deep concern for the salvation of his own brethren
 - c. And so should we!
 - 2. But the good news is, that when Paul, the consummate teacher, gives his teacher's review, he usually elaborates and takes these concepts a step further
 - a. And there are lessons for us when he does that
 - 3. And in the next three verses he explains some basic issues of the doctrine that we don't want to think about – reprobation
 - a. But think about them we must
 - b. Especially if we want to make sure we don't experience that doctrine first hand
 - c. And Paul does that through two OT quotations
 - 4. **Romans 11:8–10 (ESV) —**
 - a. 8 as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day."
 - b. 9 And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them;
 - c. 10 let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever."
 - 5. Wow!

- a. He told us in the last verse, “the rest were hardened”
 - b. Now, he tells us how God hardened them!
- 6. “God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day.”
- 7. How are we to understand that?
 - a. Why would God do something like that?
- B. **Judicial Hardening**
 - 1. The first thing we need to understand is to whom God does it
 - a. And this is critical for you to understand what is going on with election by grace and reprobation
 - 2. Election and reprobation have this in common
 - a. God does each with **Sinners**
 - b. God elects sinners
 - c. And God passes over sinners in reprobation
 - 3. When God elects sinners to salvation it is by grace
 - a. If we trust in Jesus as our Savior, he saves us, not because we deserve it
 - b. Grace doesn’t mean that God doesn’t give us what we deserve
 - c. Grace means that God gives us the opposite of what we deserve
 - 4. But in reprobation, for those who do not trust Jesus as savior, God gives sinners what we all deserve
 - 5. This is called **Judicial Hardening**
 - a. God’s act of hardening – giving them a spiritual stupor – is in response to the sinners act of rejecting the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ
 - 6. Here’s where election and reprobation are different
 - a. They are alike in that both are applied to the sinner
 - b. But they are different in that in grace and election, God works in the hearts of sinners to give us a desire and affection for Jesus that we don’t have by nature
 - c. He gives us a new heart the scripture says (both OT and NT); a heart that when given the opportunity will call on the name of the Lord and be saved
 - d. God’s posture toward His elect is active; he “works in us to will and to work for His good pleasure” (**Philippians 2.13**)
 - e. We are “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but born of God” (**John 1.13**)
 - 7. But reprobation is different
 - a. God’s posture toward the sinner is passive
 - b. He let’s the sinner continue to sin
 - c. Continue to reject God’s righteousness
 - d. He let’s the sinner do what the sinner wants to do by nature
 - 8. The unbeliever doesn’t want to hear – God gives them ears that are more and more deaf to the things of God

- a. The unbeliever doesn't want to see – God gives them eyes that are more and more blind so they won't see what they don't want to see
- 9. So, God doesn't create evil in neutral humans
 - a. He lets sinful humans do what sinful humans want to do
- 10. And that's called judicial hardening
- 11. Remember, that's what Paul said about Pharaoh back in Chapter 9
 - a. In fact, what Moses said about Pharaoh back in Exodus
- 12. That's the first thing about how God hardens sinners who refuse the grace of God

C. **Blessings and Snares**

- 1. The second thing God does in His hardening of sinners is He uses the blessings of life
 - a. Especially the spiritual blessings as religious people (remember, Paul has in mind his own kinsmen)
- 2. And He uses the blessings to become a snare to them
 - a. Creating false sense of security
 - b. And eventually becoming a stumbling block
- 3. **Romans 11:9 (ESV) —**
 - a. 9 **And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them..."**
- 4. "Their table" – metaphor for life's good gifts
- 5. We're very much aware of how much our material gifts can become a stumbling block
 - a. We can easily become dependent on stuff rather than God
 - b. And an excess of material goods can give us the false impression that we don't need God
- 6. But there are dangers even in our spiritual blessings
- 7. Baptism
 - a. Have you been baptized?
 - b. You should be; or should have been
 - c. But do you look at your baptism as your eternal insurance policy
 - d. "I've been baptized so I must be ok"
 - e. But baptism is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual work of God
 - f. We learned that back in Romans 6
 - g. It represents our being born again, our being cleansed from our sin by faith in Jesus Christ
 - h. There's nothing in the water or in the ritual that causes anything
 - i. It merely represents the spiritual work of God in you
 - j. There are denominations that teach wrongly about this issue, and see in baptism actually conferring spiritual life
 - k. That is simply false
 - l. And it is a spiritual blessing that can lead to a false sense of security
 - m. And become a stumbling block
- 8. Communion – same thing

- a. It is a wonderful blessing for us to taste and see the emblems of our Lord's body and blood
- b. But those elements are not the actual body and blood of our Lord
- c. He's in heaven!
- d. He died once for all
- e. We receive those emblems as the scripture teaches so that we would remember His death on our behalf
- f. Spiritually, Christ promises His presence with us as we share that meal together
- g. But to think that we're ok because we eat that meal can be a false sense of security
- h. It can become a stumbling block
- 9. And any other "Christian" activity can be a stumbling block, and give us a false sense of security
- 10. In reprobation, God allows sinners to continue in their sin, and actually lets the blessings of life – even religious blessings – to become a snare to them
- 11. Do you rely on the blessing God gives? Or do you trust God alone for your salvation?

IV. **Stumblers' Purpose**

- A. Now, as we come to the last two verses of our text we return to where we started
 - 1. Remember – we spoke about forgiveness, purpose and hope
 - 2. Actually, we've already seen forgiveness in our text
 - a. That's what the elect have obtained (**Romans 11.7**) and the rest have not
 - 3. But now, in this text, we learn something about purpose and hope
- B. First, purpose
 - 1. God has a purpose
 - a. For everything!
 - b. There is nothing lost in God's economy
 - c. He has a purpose for everything
- C. And we learn in this text that God even has a purpose for the unbeliever!
 - 1. Even the sinner has a purpose in God's plan of redemption
 - 2. And that purpose involves you!
 - a. You, that is, if you're a Gentile
 - 3. Remember, Paul is concerned in this section about Jewish unbelief
 - 4. Let's see what he says
- D. **Romans 11:11** (ESV) —
 - 1. 11 **So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall?**
 - 2. **By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.**
- E. There is purpose, even for the stumbler
 - 1. And it's a twofold purpose
 - a. But first, we need to make a distinction in this passage which will lead us into hope in a moment

2. “Did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means!”
 - a. Stumble – fall
 - b. The one – stumble – has to do with the current unbelief of Israel
 - c. The second – fall – has to do with the ultimate and permanent unbelief of Paul’s kinsmen, the Jewish people
3. So currently, Paul’s kinsmen are stumbling
 - a. They do not believe in Jesus
 - b. They are hardened; and God let’s them be hardened further
4. But does that mean that the Jewish people will continue forever in a state of unbelief?
5. Paul says, “By no means!”
6. Stumble – presently – yes
 - a. Fall – permanently – no!
- F. Now, what does he say is the purpose of their stumbling?
 1. First, he says so that you might be saved!
 2. Seriously! God has allowed their unbelief so you might be saved
 3. **Romans 11:11** (ESV) —
 - a. 11 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.
- G. And that’s exactly what has happened, isn’t it?
 1. Read the book of Acts
 2. The Jewish Christians are persecuted in Jerusalem
 - a. They are scattered – they go all over Judea and Samaria
 - b. And by golly, Samaritans come to faith in Jesus
 - c. And Philip leads an Ethiopian eunuch to faith in Jesus, and he goes back and evangelizes east Africa!
 3. Peter is run out of town, goes to Joppa
 - a. Cornelius, the Roman centurion, has a dream, sends for Peter
 - b. And Peter leads him and his family to Jesus
 4. And others are run out of the territory, and the gospel goes to Cypress and Syria and more Gentiles come to faith in Jesus
 5. And then the church in Antioch, Syria, send Paul and others on missionary journeys all over Asia Minor and into Europe in Greece
 - a. And they go from synagogue in a particular city and preach the gospel to Jews
 - b. And when the Jews reject the gospel they go to Gentiles in those regions
 - c. And it happens over and over again, in city after city in Asia and in Macedonia and Greece
 6. And eventually Gentiles all over the known world hear about Jesus
 7. Why?
 - a. Because the Jews would not believe the gospel
 - b. They stumbled
 8. But God had a purpose in their stumbling

- a. And if you're a Gentile believer in Jesus, you are the recipient of God's redemptive purpose
 - b. Even in the unbelief of the Jewish people
- H. But there's more
 - 1. A secondary purpose
 - 2. **Romans 11:11** (ESV) —
 - a. 11 So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means!
 - b. Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, **so as to make Israel jealous.**
 - 3. So God has a purpose in this for the Jewish people also!
 - a. He will use the faith of Gentiles in order to make Israel jealous
 - b. "What do they have that I, as a Jew, really ought to have?"
 - 4. We'll say more about this in the coming weeks
 - a. But for now, remember – even in unbelief, God has a redemptive purpose

V. **Stumblers' Hope**

- A. So, we've seen forgiveness in this passage, and we seen purpose
 - 1. What about hope?
 - 2. Yep, it's there too!
- B. **Romans 11:12** (ESV) —
 - 1. 12 **Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!**
- C. We'll see more in coming messages about the hope for the Jewish people, but for now, it's a hint, a glimmer
 - 1. But still, it's a great promise of hope
- D. First, "their trespass" – that is, the Jewish rejection of Messiah Jesus
 - 1. "Means riches for the world" – that is, the Gentiles who come to saving faith in Jesus
- E. Then: "how much more will their full inclusion mean!"
 - 1. "Their full inclusion"
- F. Is God finished with the Jewish people?
 - 1. No! Absolutely not!
 - 2. This text speaks of their "full inclusion"
 - a. We'll see more of what that means in future messages
 - b. But now, let's put it this way:
- G. Right now – in Paul's day and in our day – there is a remnant of Jewish people who trust Jesus as savior
 - 1. But there will come a time when it will be no mere remnant, no mere leftover
 - 2. There will be a fullness of Jewish faith in Messiah Jesus
- H. That is not to say that every single descendant of Jacob will become a believer, but it will be a substantial portion of Jewish people who will believe in Jesus

1. And that is not even to say what relation those Jews who trust in Jesus will have to the state called Israel in the Middle East either
 - a. Only to say, that the Jewish people will finally become jealous of Gentile faith in Jesus
 - b. And the gospel will be proclaimed in Israel and to Jews in every corner of the globe in their dispersion
 - c. And there will be a revival of faith in Messiah Jesus unlike any revival we've seen even in the Gentile world!
- I. **Romans 11:12** (ESV) —
 1. 12 Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, **how much more will their full inclusion mean!**
 2. That's the great Messianic hope
 - a. A sure hope, in the finest biblical sense of the world
 - b. A hope certain to be manifested for the glory of God!

VI. Conclusion

- A. Are you a Jewish person?
 1. Bless you, friend!
 - a. Will you not consider Jesus?
 - b. Who gave Himself as the sacrifice for the sins of all those who will ever believe in Him, Jew and Gentile
 - c. Whose sacrifice fulfilled all the sacrifices of the Old Covenant, making them obsolete
 2. Please, friend, know this that God says to you:
 - a. "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people" (**Romans 10.21**)
 3. Will you not cast yourself on the mercy of God and be saved by Messiah Jesus?
- B. And you Gentiles?
 1. Do you not see that you are the object of the grace of God?
 - a. That only through Jesus can you have forgiveness, purpose, and hope?
 2. Are you not aware that your friendship with your Jewish neighbors may be the only Christ they will see?
 3. Will you not be the instrument of their hearing about Messiah Jesus?
- C. May this be the beginning of the time when the great ingathering of the descendants of Abraham will take place!