

God's Irrevocable Calling
Romans 11:25-32 (09/08/13)
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The year 1948 was special. Besides the fact that a few of us here at Faith Bible Church were born that year, so was the nation of Israel, but not without much opposition. Five surrounding nations immediately attacked Israel. With intense determination she survived to the present day. She has many neighbors who would like to push her into the sea. Whether she has returned to her land in fulfillment of prophecy remains to be seen. The fact is, however, that at some point her Messiah is going to return to save her as a nation and fulfill all those glorious promises God made to Israel in the Old Testament and the New.

Turn to Romans 11. Romans 9-11 has been quite a marathon, but we see the finish line just ahead. Let's plunge right into our text, Romans 11:25-32. We're going to divide this into three key parts that feed the great truth that God keeps His promises; His gifts and calling are irrevocable.

God doesn't want you to be ignorant – v. 25a

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery--so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—

I hope you came with your thinking cap on today. A disciple is a learner, a *mathetes* (Greek). When you come to Christ you really begin to learn stuff. And you are in God's continual learning institution until you die. As a young believer I read Dwight Pentecost's book *Things Which Become Sound Doctrine*, which covers the major truths of salvation like predestination, justification, adoption, and so on. I remember feeling when I was finished, "Well, now I know everything about salvation." How wrong I was!

Brothers and sisters, God doesn't want you to be ignorant. He wants you to keep on growing every day for the rest of your life. Never get bored with God's Word or with biblical knowledge. Paul doesn't want us to be uninformed, which means ignorant. Our word "agnostic" comes from this Greek word. Paul used the same phrase in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 about the rapture of the church. The Lord is coming for His people, whether they are dead or alive, and is going to catch us up to Him in the earth's atmosphere, and we will always be with the Lord.

Now Paul is going to unveil a mystery he believes is really important. A mystery is not something you can't understand. A mystery in the New Testament is information you would never have known if God hadn't revealed it to you. The word is used 22 times in the New Testament. There's an interesting mystery Paul reveals in 1 Corinthians 15:51. "We will not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." He's really not talking about the church nursery. No, he explains how our great transformation is going to happen – instantly, in the twinkling of an eye. You're driving down the Lloyd or eating at a restaurant and just about to take another bite or about to ask that young lady to marry you and phut! You're changed and with the Lord. How cool is that? You'd have never come up with that on your own. God has to reveal these things to us. And here, Paul has a mystery, information about us Gentiles and the Jews and what's going to happen in the future. It's a mystery revealed!

And notice why Paul wants us to know this, so we won't think we Gentiles are better than the Jews since God has been saving us. Along with knowledge must always be humility! We have no business ever preening our feathers thinking we're somehow better than the Jews. What are we? Dogs eating at the children's table! Yet blessed to sit with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in God's kingdom. But don't think God is finished with the nation of Israel and now it's mainly Gentiles until the end. That's what this mystery is all about. So keep your humility hat on. Walk humbly with your God.

God wants us Gentiles to understand His plan for Israel's future – vv. 25b-29

That a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion; He will remove

ungodliness from Jacob. This is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins." From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

Here's the mystery, and it unfolds in three parts:

1. A partial hardening has happened to Israel. While Jews have come to Christ over the last 2000 years, many have been hardened and are to this very day. Israel as a nation is spiritually far from God. Shmuley Boteach is an orthodox rabbi and a popular media personality. He recently ran for congress but lost. He's also a powerful speaker. I listened to his commencement address at Southern Utah University this spring. I haven't heard such passion and eloquence in a speaker for a long time. He recently published a book entitled *Kosher Jesus*. He writes that Jews have lots to learn from Jesus. Jews should accept Jesus as "a man of great wisdom, beautiful ethical teachings, and profound Jewish patriotism." But as Lord and Savior? Sadly, no. Another Jewish author, Benyamin Cohen, spent a year visiting churches and wrote *My Jesus Year*. He admits he is jealous that Christians have Jesus. "Judaism doesn't have a superhero like that." What did he learn from his "Jesus" year? Here's his conclusion: "There are many roads leading to spiritual maturity and even to God Himself, and all of us have to find our own way." Sad, isn't it? Ever since the first century Israel has been hardened to the gospel in part.
2. During this period up to our day, God is calling out a people for Himself from the Gentiles. God is busy harvesting mainly Gentiles right now. This is a missionary text. Our purpose is to proclaim the glories of God among the nations, telling people about the gospel, walking and talking the gospel every day. Think of all the Gentiles you'll get to meet when you get to heaven. I hope you'll be there. But right now, and especially up to the rapture of the church, God is calling Gentiles. We have the privilege of being part of this fullness. And don't think each day is another random day in God's plan. No, God is operating on His own schedule and He is right on time.
3. "Until" indicates a coming moment in time. At some point God will move mightily on the nation of Israel and will save her as a nation! "And so all Israel will be saved." All Israel is a technical term. Paul doesn't mean all those Jews who came to Christ throughout the centuries. That isn't a mystery. He means Israel as a nation. That's his whole point in these three chapters. What about Israel? Remember last week in verse 12, God used Israel's transgression to bring the wealth and riches of the gospel to the Gentiles. And in verse 15 Paul asks, "What will their future acceptance be but life from the dead." Now God is busy grafting Gentiles into His tree of redemption. But at some point in the future, God is going to shift His focus back on Israel as a nation. He hasn't forgotten her!

This takes us to these promises from the Old Testament. Paul took these literally, that they literally were about Israel, ethnic Israel, not the Gentiles. There are those who believe Israel here means as saved Jews and Gentiles, the people of God. But that cannot stand up in this context. And this is tough for those who do not believe God is going to deal with Israel again as a nation. There are many Reformed scholars who still reject that Paul is talking about a future nation of Israel. Luther and Calvin and especially the covenant theologians reject the idea of a national conversion of Israel. They'll say the church has replaced Israel, or "becomes" Israel. There are others, however, like James Montgomery Boice, who taught that God definitely has a coming day of national conversion for Israel. Someone asked me last week for a verse these guys use to teach that the church is spiritual Israel. Typically they'll go to Galatians 6:16, which says, "Mercy upon them, and upon the Israel of God." You've got two groups there, "them" (Gentile believers) and "the Israel of God" (Jewish believers). Every Jewish believer even today is part of the "Israel of God."

So Paul says the deliverer, who must be Jesus, Israel's Messiah, will come from Zion and will do two things for all Israel – cleanse them of their wickedness, their unbelief, their rebellion and disobedience. That will be regeneration for a huge number of Israelites. And He will remove the guilt of their sin. Remember Paul's grief over Israel's rejection of Christ in Romans 9? He even said he'd be willing to go to hell if his fellow Jews could be saved. And now he writes this with the greatest of rejoicing and glorying in God. He starts "Just as it is written." He totally believed God would keep His ancient promises to His people Israel. God didn't promise Israel He would save them but really meant the Gentiles.

Look at verses 28-29. Israel is both God's enemies and God's beloved! Because Israel rejected and crucified her Messiah, they are God's enemies. But God planned for this for our sake, so the gospel would go out to the nations. On the other hand, God had chosen Israel out of all the nations to be His special people. He made unconditional promises with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that He would give them that land, a vast number of descendants, and make them a blessing to the nations. Listen to Deuteronomy 32:10, speaking of Israel, "He found him in a desert land, And in the howling waste of a wilderness; He encircled him, He cared for him, He guarded him as the pupil of His eye." That's God's choosing Israel uniquely out of all the nations of history. Of no other nation has God said anything like this. In Zechariah 2:8 He says, "Whoever touches Israel to harm her touches the apple of God's eye!" All the hatred and persecution and slaughter of Jews over the centuries has not gone unnoticed by God! God has a special place and plan for Israel, and we firmly believe when Christ returns they will look on Him whom they crucified and many, many Jews will be saved! What a glorious day that will be.

How do we know all of this is coming for Israel? Because God does not go back on His Word – His gifts and calling are irrevocable, verse 29. Regardless of how wicked Israel has been, God gave them the Law and all kinds of gifts, and God set them apart as special among the nations, their calling, and He is not going back on it. He is not saying, "Well, I said all that about Israel, but they have been such evil, wicked, rebellious people, I'm just not going to keep my promises to them!"

Now, how does all this work out in the future? We can't cover all of eschatology in five minutes. We are offering a class on Premillennialism next fall if you want to get a fuller grasp on all this. But let's take a quick look at two fantastic passages in Zachariah that describe both the coming conversion of Israel as a nation and conditions on earth when Christ returns and sets up His kingdom that will cover the entire globe. That prayer, "Thy kingdom come" will yet be fulfilled on earth.

First, Zechariah 8:1-8. Then the word of the LORD of hosts came, saying, 2 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I am exceedingly jealous for Zion, yes, with great wrath I am jealous for her.' 3 "Thus says the LORD, 'I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain.' 4 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of age. 5 'And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets.' 6 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'If it is too difficult in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, will it also be too difficult in My sight?' declares the LORD of hosts. 7 "Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Behold, I am going to save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; 8 and I will bring them back and they will live in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God in truth and righteousness.'

And then, Zechariah 14:1-9 Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. 2 For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. 3 Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle. 4 In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. 5 You will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him! 6 In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. 7 For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light. 8 And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter. 9 And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one.

God is excited about saving His people Israel. All of this will happen during the seven year tribulation period spoken of by Daniel, Jesus in Matthew 24, and then Revelation 6-20. Look again at verse 9 and

rejoice. Christ is coming to the Mount of Olives and will rule over the entire world. This will be the MTV we're looking for: Messiah's Total Victory!

God does not want us to be ignorant that all His saving purposes flow from His sovereign mercy – vv. 30-32.

For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.

What's the bottom line? Whether Gentiles or Jews, God's big purpose is to glorify or make much of His name by showing mercy to people who only deserve judgment. Neither Gentiles nor Jews deserve God's salvation. We are all inmates in the prison called Disobedience. The door is locked. That Jewish author was sadly wrong. There are not many ways out. There is no way out. You can't tunnel out or climb over the walls. It's a place of deep darkness and slavery, of guilt and condemnation, a holding place for future eternal judgment. God has locked us all up in there.

Suddenly Christ breaks down that door, light bursts in, forgiveness and hope and eternal life are offered to all through Christ and His work on that cross for disobedient Gentiles and Jews. God is showing mercy to all. By the mercy of God the door of that prison house of sin has been blown wide open and anyone who wants may walk right out through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ!

He left His Father's throne above
So free, so infinite His grace—
Humbled Himself and came in love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For O my God, it found out me!
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For O my God, it found out me!