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Romans 11:13-15, 28-32

**GOD'S PLAN:
GIVING THE GOSPEL TO ONE
TO WIN THE OTHER**

In Romans 11 the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to reveal a part of God's plan of salvation that is rarely talked about anymore -perhaps because of our culture of hyper-sensitive political correctness. Paul uncovers God's continuing and deliberate plan to convert those of the Jewish religion to faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. It is a plan from which you and I, as Gentiles, have been happy recipients. It is also a plan in which God intends to use our happy good fortune in Jesus to return the favor as it were and bring back that saving message to those in Judaism. In other words, God's plan still involves you and me very much both as receivers and givers of His salvation.

During my years in New York I knew and met many Jewish people. I can testify that those whom I met

would find the very notion of this sermon to be highly offensive -almost as though it would be illegal. They called it proselytizing. This sermon would be met with anger.

Therefore, let us be clear, salvation does not come from people's DNA or ancestry or nationality or blood or political or cultural affiliation. It comes from Jesus. The Bible reveals that God wants all people to be saved. But He has provided only one way for salvation to happen: through faith in Jesus. Jesus Himself said, *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.* So when Paul writes in Romans 11 about God's desire for the conversion of the Jewish people, his words are spoken in the sincerest love. He is also speaking about people who believe in the Jewish religion without Jesus, those who pledge to the doctrine and teaching of Judaism, that is to say, people who put their faith in the wrong thing.

With the background of hurricane Harvey and its devastation, let's use an analogy. Imagine there is a family with a motorboat. Let's call them the Joneses. The Joneses permit you to use their boat to rescue all your family and your friends from the rising floodwaters. After you and your family are all safe and on dry land you bring the motorboat back to the

Joneses. You tell them, “It worked really well for me and my family. It saved our lives. Here’s your boat. I’d like you to benefit now from your own boat. Use it to save yourselves and your families and friends before the water overtakes you.” But they reply, “No thanks. Even though it’s our boat, we don’t want the boat. We intend to rescue ourselves by our own effort. We intend to swim to safety.”

In this analogy, the boat is Jesus. The Joneses are people who believe in Judaism. Jesus, the Savior, came from the Jewish people. He belongs to the Jews. He is the Jewish Messiah. Salvation is offered to all people through faith in Jesus. But sadly, only a few Jewish people put their faith in Jesus. The majority have adhered to the religion of Judaism. That means they still reject the Triune God of the Bible. It means they still reject that Jesus is their Savior. They intend to find salvation on the basis of their own efforts, their own moral character, and their observance of religious rituals. Some actually hang their hopes for a good status with God on their DNA and ancestry.

The fact that Jesus was largely rejected by the Jewish people was a fulfillment of many prophecies in the Old Testament. In Romans 11 Paul quotes Isaiah and King

David foretelling they would reject Jesus. Jesus Himself predicted it. Therefore God sent the Apostle Paul, who was a Jew, as a missionary particularly to the Gentiles. It was as if God were saying, “Fine, if you don’t want this Savior I’ve given you, then I will offer Him to someone else.” Yet even with this drastic change of direction, God’s purpose was not to shut out or reject Jewish people. Listen again to what Paul said was God’s amazing and gracious plan: *I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy 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?*

Perhaps if the Joneses could see how well the boat rescues others from the deadly floodwaters, perhaps they’d be inclined to use the boat. Perhaps if those who cling to Judaism could see how glorious and happy is the salvation their Messiah gives to Gentiles who believe in Him, perhaps they might be nudged to give Jesus a second look.

Lest you and I are ever tempted to complacency concerning what we have in connection with Jesus, lest

we are ever tempted to taking this faith for granted or thinking we are somehow better or more deserving of the gospel, let this truth humble us: We have received the gospel of Jesus by default. Not by merit. Not by preference. But as an undeserved gift. As a way of winning *others* to this salvation. It's not a compliment to you if a girl agrees to go on a date to you, but only because she wants to get closer to your brother. In the same way, God's plan was giving the gospel to one to win the other.

Yet what do we see in ourselves? We look at these things as if they were ours by right -the gospel of God's forgiveness by the death and resurrection of Jesus and with it everything else we've inherited, everything else handed down to us: the Church, the Word and Sacraments, the creeds, the hymns, the liturgy which is so full of Jewish expressions of faith fulfilled in the Messiah - we act as if these things will always be there, as if we can take it or leave it because we are so busy or because there are more interesting things elsewhere or we just don't get around to it -and so our church attendance lags, our attention to the gospel fades, our offerings dwindle, sanctified living wanes among us, and our zeal to reach this community with the good news cools off.

That's because we have naturally unbelieving hearts that are inclined away from God and His truth. Wouldn't we consider it outrageously selfish or irresponsible if a person had a perfectly fine motorboat in the floods of hurricane Harvey and they let it drift away uselessly or kept it in their garage and didn't use it to save themselves or others? But that's what we are guilty of with the gospel that we have been given by God to save our lives and the lives of others.

So let us repent so that God doesn't out of exasperation take this gospel away from us. Let us embrace in faith the very gospel we've been given to receive God's forgiveness through Jesus' death and resurrection. He does indeed yet forgive us and calls us to His salvation. At the same time let's also have a renewed interest and zeal in absorbing and spreading this good news about salvation in Jesus for our own salvation and the salvation of others.

For God is still holding out the invitation to all the world to believe in Jesus, especially to the Jewish people. Listen again to Romans 11: *As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account* -what that means is Christians are often hated for trying to

reach out with the gospel, just like Paul was often persecuted severely on his missionary journeys, but God does not want Christians as far as they are able to be an enemy to anyone. We read on: *As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs [meaning, the Jewish ancestors -Abraham, Isaac and Jacob], for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.*

All people, no matter what race or what part of the globe they come from, are equally sinful, equally incapable of saving themselves from death and hell. Therefore, if anyone is saved, if anyone encounters the gospel and as a result comes to faith in Christ, it is purely a gift of God's grace and kindness. God does not owe it to us. There is no reason in us why God saves us. The cause is found entirely in Him and the credit goes entirely to Him.

You might say, “But I don’t know anyone who is Jewish or believes in Judaism.” Fine, but let us nevertheless have a heart still to pray in love for them and for those who reach out to them with the good news of Jesus. After all, we are indebted to the Jewish people as the Savior came to us through them. In addition, there are many other people you do know who have never heard the gospel before or who don’t believe in it. God’s desire is also for their interest in Jesus to be piqued by their association with you the Christian.

Therefore, let us hear the gospel, let us believe the gospel, let us prize the gospel, let us live the gospel and let us share the gospel with everyone we can. For in giving it to us, God’s plan is to win others for salvation. God gives it to one to win the other.

