

DIVINE PERSISTENCE

Romans 11

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Romans 11. The advantage of expository Scripture is we take the Scripture where it finds us.

Fascinatingly enough, whenever we open the Scripture we find that it will speak to us. You will find that this Word today will speak to you.

The theme of this morning's sermon is "Divine Persistence." Rather than read the chapter in its entirety at the beginning of the message, we will make continual reference to this chapter as we pursue it today.

One of the most famous religious poems of this century is "The Hound of Heaven" by the Englishman Frances Thompson, who died in 1907. To gratify his father's ambition, Francis Thompson had embarked on a medical career, then failed to pass his final examination. Seeking refuge from reproach, he lived a life of obscurity, and then began selling books—and then later working in the book trade. Both enterprises, he failed. He enlisted as a soldier, and he was discharged for incompetence. Thereafter, Thompson lived in the lowest conceivable kind of poverty, selling matches in the daytime and sleeping on the river's embankment at night. In broken health and addicted to opium, he tried writing. Fragments of his writing found their way to an editor who, with his wife, located Thompson. They found him emaciated and clothed in rags. They took him, restored him to health, and brought him to faith.

In his poem "Hound of Heaven," he describes a person who is running from God—the journey of his own life. He says, "I fled Him, down the nights and down the days; I fled Him, down the arches of the years; I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind; and in the mist of tears I hid from Him."

In this epic poem, he continues to trace how he's fleeing from God and how God, the Hound of Heaven, is running after him until he comes to this brilliant moment: "But with unhurrying

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chase, and unperturbed pace, deliberate speed, majestic instancy they beat—and a voice beat more instant than the feet, All things betray thee, who betrayest Me.”

In Romans 9, 10, and 11 we see the nation of Israel fleeing like Francis Thompson from the Hound of Heaven. And God—whose footsteps lovingly beat after His people—is following after them. As we have looked at this section of Romans, a major section in the book, we’ve seen that Romans 9 reflects the freedom of God, that God elects whom He will. God never enters into any obligation towards any nation or person which in any way fetters His liberty to reject those who will not receive Him on faith. Romans 10 speaks of the freedom of man. Both of these truths are set side by side. God is free, and man is free. God’s election, His choice, His freedom to choose, is not an arbitrary freedom. The essential reason for Israel’s downfall was not God’s election, but it was its own disobedience.

In Romans 11, the third part of this magnificent movement and this section of Romans dealing with the nation of Israel, Paul speaks of God’s persistence. Romans 9 and Romans 10 are not God’s last word concerning His people Israel. Israel is not doomed to final rejection. Paul is going to say the temporary lapse of Israel forms part of God’s great plan. And one day, the nation of Israel is to come back into the place of God where there is an acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah, and where the nation of Israel as a whole is a living evangelist and a living testimony of the God who has most perfectly manifested himself in Jesus the Messiah.

I. Romans 11 tells us that Israel’s failure is not complete.

And it tells us that Israel’s failure is not permanent. Paul begins by asking a question: “I ask then: Did God reject his people?” (Romans 11:1, NIV). This is a crucial question. For if God has rejected the people whom He called first in Abraham, then how is it that we can count on God for anything? Are the promises of God sure? When God gives His word, will He keep it? If He

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will not keep his word which He gave to Abraham, how can we be sure that He will keep His word which He has given to us from the Cross? Will God change His mind?

Paul's answer to this question, "Has God rejected His people?" takes a number of number of different facets. He, first of all, rejects the idea that God would reject His people. He rejects it out of hand by this phrase, "By no means!" (NIV). And he has used this phrase, "By no means," ten times already in the letter. Every time he comes to what he conceives to be a ridiculous question, he comes back with: "By no means!" But he's not arbitrary in this, for every time he uses the phrase, "By no means," he then proceeds to give the rationale for the answer which he brings. In other words, he's not like the parent whose child comes to him and says, "Why are we doing this?" and the parent says, "Shut up!" I'm not exhorting parents here to always explain everything to their children. But there's kind of a logic, though, in the apostle Paul that's fascinating. On the one hand, he will say, "By no means." Then he'll turn around and provide further supporting rationale. Has God rejected His people? Has He cast them off? Has He said to Israel, "Shove off; I'll have nothing more to do with you"? By no means.

As part of the answer to the fact that God has not rejected His people, Paul cites himself. "I am an Israelite myself, a descendent of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin" (verse 1, NIV). "God couldn't have rejected His people, because I am one of His people. I am from the tribe of Benjamin, and I am living illustration of the fact that God has not completely rejected His people."

Paul also uses, in verses 2 through 6, the idea of the remnant to suggest that God has not rejected His people. "God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: 'Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me' And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who

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have not bowed the knee to Baal’ So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace” (Romans 11:2–6, NIV).

Paul is saying the fact that God has not rejected His people is established by the fact that wherever the gospel has gone, there have been Jewish persons who have believed. Indeed, with the church in Jerusalem—with a great expansion of the gospel from Pentecost onward, and in every key center of the Mediterranean world where the gospel has been preached—the core of the congregation has first been established as Jewish persons who had first accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Paul says, “If you look at the history of Israel, you will find that these believers within Israel composed the remnant.” They are the believers within the group whom God called. And Paul says, “If it looks like the mass of the Jewish people today are rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, do not forget that the existence of a remnant is case illustrated that God has not rejected His people. But within His people, there are believers.”

And he cites the case of Elijah. Elijah hid out in a cave from Ahab and Jezebel after calling down fire on Mount Carmel. You would probably hide in a cave, too, if Jezebel were after you—although I’m not so sure, in our society. Elijah is pondering this question. God had made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to their seed. And now, as Elijah surveyed the situation, it looked like all the promises came down to him. He was the last one left. And if he perished from the scene, how could God keep His promises to His people? There’s a certain trace of self-pity involved in his statement, “I am the only one left” (verse 3).

I think, for example, of my own family in relationship of how Elijah must have felt about the cause of God. God’s promises are going to come to an end. Before my son was born, my parents had seven granddaughters, and there was no one left to carry on the “Wood” family name. I know in the phone book there are lots of Woods. But there was no one left to carry on the

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George Wood family name that stems from the Pennsylvania area. So when little George Paul was born, believe me, there was kindled a hope—which may not come to pass for thirty years, but the family name would continue.

Elijah is concerned about the Name of God continuing in His people. And the Lord reminds Elijah twice in the midst of his cave that He has seven thousand more that have not bowed the knee. They may not have been as courageous as Elijah to take on Ahab and Jezebel. They may have had kind of a faith which kept them hidden out, without bowing the knee and not publicly proclaiming their allegiance to Jehovah. But they, nevertheless, are a remnant within Israel. Paul is saying, “If there was a remnant in Elijah’s day, there’s also one today.” He’s speaking of the apostolic day, and he’s even speaking of today. There are persons within this church family who come from Jewish families, a believing remnant within Israel. And Paul very clearly points out that even the remnant has not earned God’s grace. They’ve not earned it. They have not stood out like Elijah and publicly proclaimed their faith in Jehovah. And even if they had, they would still not have earned God’s grace because no one can put God in his debt. We get into trouble when we try.

If you ever have felt, “Lord, I’ve done this and this for you. At least in this area, You could at least have come through! After all, I did have some merit in the bank!” Here, very clearly, the Scripture is teaching God is not going to be anyone’s debtor. It is all of grace. We meet God in debt. And within Israel itself, there is the believing remnant.

By the way, I would say when we look at the church world itself, we must understand that when we see a church as an institution going apostate, we must always remember that within that church—within that group—there is the believing remnant who have remained faithful to Christ. Micah prophesies of the remnant of Israel when he says in chapter 2, “I will surely gather you, Jacob. I will gather the remnant of Israel. I will set them together like sheep in a fold, like flock

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in its pasture.” In the noisy multitude, Micah sees the small flock that God is going to gather as the remnant of Israel.

When we speak of a remnant, I visualize for a moment a large cloth in my hand. I’m going to tear a small piece off, and it will be the remnant. It would not be the remnant if I would take the small piece and tear it up into all kinds of smaller pieces. That would be pieces, and not a remnant. So what is being suggested in this phrase of “remnant” is not that there are simply single individuals here and there that are called out. But rather, these persons—once called out—form an association, a fellowship together, so that they even though they are a small piece of cloth, they form a whole piece of cloth together.

It is this kind of idea which Jesus has in mind, I think, when in His own heart—knowing the prophecy of Micah that He would gather the flock and that the flock would be remnants—He says once to His disciples, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). And He says in the gospel of John, “I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice so there will be one flock and one shepherd.” Jesus sees His work among His own people as the gathering of that believing remnant, that small flock to which He is going to add the others in the sheepfold of the world, the Gentiles, to himself.

So Paul is saying, “Has God rejected His people? No. He’s got a remnant.” What then about the rest who are not the remnant? “What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, as it is written: ‘God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes so that they could not see and ears so that they could not hear, to this very day.’ And David says: ‘May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever’” (Romans 11:7–10, NIV).

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They seem like terribly stern words, don't they? If you just read them and don't read the context of the rest of Romans, or the context of the rest of Scripture, you come up with some kind of idea like this: God, one day in heaven, makes up His mind. There's certain people I'm going to elect, and there's certain people I'm going to harden. And there's nothing you can do about it because God gave them a spirit of hardness, and He gave them a spirit of stupor. If we have carefully gone through this Scripture, we find that the reverse is true. Because, while God is free to elect, the blame on not being elected is laid to man's responsibility of obedience or disobedience.

The prophecy here that is quoted from Isaiah has an interesting context within Isaiah's prophecy itself. For the book of Isaiah opens with a call to the heavens to hear divine accusation against the nation of Israel. "Hear, O heavens and give ear, O earth. For the LORD has spoken. Sons have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner and the ass his master's crib, but Israel does not know. My people do not understand" (Isaiah 1:2-3, NIV).

Given that as the general framework of rebellion and disobedience toward the Lord, which Isaiah, in the first chapter, goes on to specifically articulate, Isaiah 6 then relates the call of Isaiah. When Isaiah is called and has his momentous vision in the temple, the Lord says, "Go to this people and say, "Hear and not understand, see and not perceive." He says to Isaiah, "Your ministry is going to be one of hardening people." How is it God will do this? It is that He has already looked at the sin and the rebellion of the people and He says, "You elect not to choose Me. You elect to walk in disobedience. Then I ratify your decision and your choice, and I confirm you in your hardness." There comes a time when the person or the nation who would not respond finally cannot respond. That is the essence of the hardening process. This "hardening" which Paul speaks of is really used, also, as a callous. It is the same word used for callous. It describes a growth over the spiritual heart. And stupor describes a drowsy sleepy-headedness—a spiritual zombie, if you will. One that cannot come to grips with spiritual realities.

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So, as Paul surveys Israel of his day—and as we survey Israel of our day—we say there has come over Israel a spirit of hardening and a spirit of stupor. In all of those who are not among the remnant who have believed in Jesus as the Messiah.

Has Israel been rejected? No, the rejection is not complete. There is the believing remnant.

II. Paul then asks, “Is Israel’s failure permanent?”

And in verses 11–32, we have some of the most fascinating teaching, I think, anywhere in Scripture. In verse 11 and 12, Paul begins by stating the principles which are going to relate to the future of Israel. If you remember, in going through these three chapters, we said Romans 9 relates to God’s past dealings with Israel; Romans 10 to His present dealings; and Romans 11 to His future dealings. Basically, in these two verses, Paul is saying: “Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!” (Romans 11:11-12, NIV).

What Paul is simply saying is that because the nation of Israel as a whole, for this time, turned away from the Messiah, it has created the opportunity to go to the Gentiles. If you look at the Old Testament clearly, I think you will get a vision that God called Israel to be a witness and a light to the Gentiles. But in losing that position, the privilege and the responsibility has been passed on to the Gentiles to be now included in what God has done throughout history.

Jesus, indeed, had said to the woman of Samaria, “You worship what you do not know. We worship what we know” (John 4) For salvation is from the Jews, and there is this historical rootedness that we have as people from God. Even if you are non-Jewish you claim, because of the Scriptures, Abraham as your father. Aristotle is not our father. Plato is not our father. Nor is anyone from the secular realm of history. When we come to faith, we confess our father

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Abraham. Salvation is from the Jews. The trespass of the Jews has led to a dissemination of the gospel—which would have occurred if the Jews had remained faithful. But, nevertheless, being temporarily set aside has not frustrated God’s plan. God’s plan is to bring salvation and the opportunity of salvation to every person.

Now Paul says if their trespass means that the Gentiles have been blessed, just think what their full inclusion will mean. So he looks to the future and says, “There will be a time when their inclusion in the kingdom of God will bring blessings unparalleled to the world. In the meantime, the Gentile church, the believing Christians, are to stir up Israel to jealousy” (see Romans 11:12-14).

How do you make someone jealous? There are two kinds of ideas in jealousy. One is to just deliver pique to someone so that they get jealous. The other kind of a way of stirring up to jealousy is through, for example, where someone wants to emulate or follow what you’re doing. William Barclay tells this little story that illustrates what I think what Paul is striving here to mean by the word “jealousy.” Barclay says: “One of the surest ways to make a person desire Christianity is to make him see in actual life what the gospel can do. There was a soldier who was wounded in battle. The padre crept out to him and did what he could for him. He stayed with him when the remainder of troops retreated. In the heat of the day, he gave him water from his own water bottle while he himself remained parched with thirst. In the night, when the chill frost came down, he gathered the wounded man with his own coat and finally wrapped him up in even more of his clothes to save him from the cold. In the end, the wounded man looked up at the padre. ‘Padre,’ he said. ‘You’re a Christian.’ ‘I try to be,’ said the padre. ‘Then’ said the wounded man, ‘If Christianity makes a man do for another man what you have done for me, tell me about it because I want it.’” It was Christianity in action which moved him to envy a faith that could produce action like that.

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So if we're to stir up jealousy toward Jewish persons or toward other Gentile persons, it is not stirred up through making angry statements, but it is stirred up through the example of love. So Paul does this near and far kind of thing with Israel. He says in the far range point of view, their inclusion is going to mean the blessing of the world. The Old Testament gives us some fascinating perceptions of what it means when Israel as a whole is finally again, by faith, the people of God. How the lion will lay down with the lamb. And how the child and the serpent will play together. How there will be peace and worship in God's holy mountain.

Paul then goes on to illustrate this teaching of the near and far by two ways. First of all, saying in his ministry to the Gentiles, he is seeing this aspect of the Gentiles being grafted in because of Israel's trespass. But, he says, "Remember, you Gentiles who have been grafted in, what God has done with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Remember that the original group, the Jewish persons, are holy to the Lord. Verse 16 is kind of a clincher: "If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches" (Romans 11:16, NIV). That's not too plain English. What's this business about dough and lump? You have to go back to the Old Testament for the reference—Numbers 15, in the offering of food to the Lord. When there was a pile of dough that was there from the product of the first harvest of the land, the whole lump didn't need to be offered to God, but, rather, simply a portion of it. That would sanctify the whole. So what Paul is saying, because Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are declared holy to God—and because the roots (another term which he used) of the Israeli people were pleasing to God—therefore, there has been a sanctifying influence over the whole nation. And he says because of this you can know that God hasn't let them go. Verse 15: "For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" (NIV). That means when they return, what will the atmosphere be? When the Jewish person returns to embrace Jesus as Messiah: Life from the dead.

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One here cannot help but think of prophecies of Hosea, for example, in which Hosea had to marry this harlot, and he wasn't even sure if the children that were born were really his own. So he gave them names like "Not my people," for example. But then in Hosea 11, verse 1 and following, Hosea the prophet goes on to speak of God's deep love for his people Israel and says something like, "How can I give you up? How can I let you go?" He says, "When you were a child, I pulled you with cords of compassion." It's almost like translating it into the modern sense—remembering now a young man who's grown up and rebelled from his family's influence. But the father, in recollecting this child, thinks of him still as the five- or six-year-old boy that used to ride in the little red wagon, and the father used to pull the wagon. What he's saying in his heart, as emotions are tugged by this son who's walking away, "How can I ever give you up? I once pulled you in your wagon!" That's how God feels toward Israel.

By the way, there's tremendous assurance for this. Because if God feels that deeply about anyone who has so consistently rejected Him over a period of years, think of how much He cares for his people. God sees us and knows us. And the beautiful statement in Luke 15 can be applied to Israel. When the son who is lost returns home, the father brings out the best robe, the ring, puts shoes on his feet, kills the fatted calf and says, "Let us eat and make merry. For this, my son, was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found." Paul says, "What will their acceptance mean, but life from the dead?" (Romans 11:15). This, My child, was lost and is found—was dead and is alive again.

Speaking of the root and branches leads Paul to the second Illustration of this teaching of Israel. Verse 17–24: "If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, 'Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.'

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Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!” (NIV).

It’s interesting to read the commentaries on this because you get an argument between the commentaries on whether Paul knew what he was talking about in horticulture. It was not the normal thing to take a wild olive branch and graft it into an olive tree because that wouldn’t produce good olives. But then the argument rages that if they do that, though, there are some indications that if you graft a wild olive branch into the olive tree, and the olive tree has been dying, losing its energy, there’s enough sap and vitality coming from the branch to give a shot of life to that which was dying.

All this isn’t what Paul’s talking about, however. His whole analogy is contrary to nature. It’s what people don’t normally do. What he’s doing is two things. He’s warning against spiritual pride. He’s saying to us, “Every spiritual blessing that you enjoy as the people of God, you enjoy to your connection to Israel and what God did with Israel. Everything, as a believer, you enjoy, you enjoy because God connected you into what He was doing with Israel. To Israel He gave the Law. To Israel He gave the Kingdom. To Israel He gave the prophets. Out of the seed of Israel came the Messiah.”

As I said earlier, in the first-century churches which he began, evidently there grew to be—in some of the churches—this party kind of a spirit of Gentiles coming along and looking at their

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Jewish brethren with disdain. I can see how this could happen, especially toward the Jerusalem church: *Those brethren in Jerusalem are so narrow-minded and so rooted in their tradition.*

Praise the Lord, we've been set free, and we have a higher understanding of the gospel than they do. So I can understand this sort of tension that would occur in the Early Church, and it occurs among people today.

I'm familiar with the church that uses the phrase, "Where the difference is worth the distance," which is kind of a subtle spiritual pride of saying, "Everything between here and there doesn't quite stack up to us. The difference is worth the distance." We always have one group boasting over another. Paul says in the olive tree there's no ground for boasting. It's the end of pride.

It's a warning, also, against departing from the faith. Paul says if you depart, you, too, will be cut off because they, too, can be grafted back in. He says, "Note, then, the severity and the kindness of God."

If you come to the Lord needy and repentant and acknowledging that you need help, you will always find the Lord to be loving, gracious, open-armed, open-hearted, forgiving, ready to help, ready to save, ready to provide what you need. But If you come to the Lord excusing yourself, justifying what you have been doing, trying to look good in God's sight, you'll always find God as hard as nails. Note His severity and His kindness.

In verses 25–32, Paul then applies the teaching and the principle to Israel. "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited" (Romans 11:25, NIV). A "mystery," when used in Scripture, is now no longer a mystery because the mystery is being understood. From the Old Testament, it was not understood. But now, since Christ has come, we understand something that wasn't revealed clearly in the Old Testament.

"I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited:

Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And

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so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.’ 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, 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” (Romans 11:25–32, NIV).

As we get into this particular section, we need to avoid two errors in regard to Israel that I think are afloat, even among the Christian world today. One error is the error which suggests that God will allow Israel to be saved on its own terms. We remember, of course, the temptation which Jesus refused: “Jump down from the pinnacle of the temple.” We remember the temptations He refused on the cross—to come down, or to have legions of angels come and help Him. To do something that would be spectacular so people would believe on Him—not on the basis of faith, but from the basis of some supernatural act for which there is no other way than to say, “Yes, it happened.” God has always worked through faith.

When we apply this to the nation of Israel and see their salvation in the future—the real struggle I have with dispensational theology—they’re saying that there will come a day, when the Son of Man returns from heaven, Israel will see Him, and they will all come to faith. I say, “What’s this, then, do to the Cross, if this is what Scripture is teaching. Because it would appear, then, that the Lord has gone back on His plan of salvation. That finally, he has capitulated to what Israel has demanded all these years—a political Messiah, a Messiah who could be seen doing miracles and wonders, rather than the suffering Messiah who calls us to believe on Him on the basis of faith. Paul, in this, Romans 11, never says that there is ever going to be any other method of salvation

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than the method of faith. So as we look for the salvation of Israel as a people, it will come through the same faith that has coursed through the people of God, the Church.

Zechariah 12:10 says when they look on him whom they have pierced, “they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, as one weeps over a firstborn.” He says that before he notes that the Son of Man will return and set His foot on the Mount of Olives. I would suggest that we need to be careful to recognize that God, through the ages, has not had many plans of saving people, but only one plan—through faith. And that He intends to pursue to the very end.

But a second error we need to avoid says that Israel’s apostasy is so complete that the Jewish people are forever the enemies of God. That is not the case. God has a future for the Jews. There was no future for the Babylonians. There was no future for the Assyrians. And I’m not sure, when another few millenniums go by, there will be a future for the American people because God never made a covenant with us that guarantees we would always be around. But God did make a covenant through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God made a covenant with David, a covenant that He keeps. For God’s gifts and call are irrevocable. God doesn’t take back what He started out to do.

The King James says, “The gifts and calling of God are without repentance.” It’s striking how that word “repentance” is used in the Old Testament. In Genesis 6, it says: “It repented the LORD that He made man.” In 1 Samuel 15, it says: “It repented the LORD that he had made Saul king.” But we never find God anywhere in Scripture repenting that He had given persons grace. God doesn’t repent of the Cross or think it’s a bad idea.

We see that salvation will come to all. That is the invitation of salvation. Verse 32 says, “For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all” (NIV).

Here we have not a statement that everyone in the end is going to be saved—because the whole

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Book of Romans has contradicted that—what we do have is a statement that God gives to all men a universal invitation.

Christina Rossetti wrote a beautiful poem which describes Christ's coming, called "Despised and Rejected." It tells of the hero of her poem being in an hour of distress, and embittered toward everybody. The hero of the poem is saying words like this: "This bitter night I will make fast my door that hollow friends may trouble me no more." But in the night, a knock is heard and a voice is pleading saying, "Rise, let me in. My feet bleed. See my face. See my hands bleed to give thee grace. My heart doth bleed for thee. Open for me." All night long the knocking continues, till at daybreak, the wretched man hears the footsteps fade away, echoing like a sigh. On opening the door, the man sees footprints marked in blood "and on the door the mark of blood forevermore." God's persistent love toward us is marked by blood. His persistent love toward Israel is marked by the fact that He will go to the death to save it and save all men. When Paul contemplates this, he cannot but break out in praise. Verses 33–36 say, "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' 'Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?' For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen" (NIV).

This is a doxology. A doxology is literally a word of praise. Romans 8, which talked about the security of the believer in Jesus, ended with a hymn to God's love. And now, when Paul's through talking about God's ways with Israel, he ends again with a hymn—this time, a hymn of God's wisdom.

We have not begun to understand this passage of Scripture until, with Paul, we can join in praise to God for God's timeless plan and His dealings through history. And in this doxology and praise to God, questions come to us. Do we believe, for example, that all God's choices and all God's

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decisions are made by God with full information, and that He is utterly fair in everything that He does? Do you believe that about God—that God does not make any decision having only half the information, that God makes no decision that is anything but fair? This is what this hymn of praise is, being given to God. When you contemplate God's dealings through history, you come to a conclusion of worship in your heart: God is utterly fair. God makes all things with complete information.

Another question this is asking us: Do you believe that God is dependent upon no one? Have you been His counselor? Was there a time recently where God said to you, "I've got a problem, and I'd like your advice on this." Dependent on no one. Do you believe that you are completely and utterly dependent upon God? As Paul says, from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. From Him are all things. God is Creator. Through Him are all things. God is the Governor and Regulator of all things as they are now. And to Him are all things. God is the End and the goal of life.

Tomorrow night is the beginning of Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year. It is from Leviticus 23, the Feast of Trumpets. There were seven festivals of time within Israel's history that God gave to them as a perpetual observance to remember Him. Four of the festivals were in the spring, and three of the festivals were in the fall. The four spring festivals were Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, and Pentecost. All of these have been fulfilled in the experience of the Church. Jesus is the Passover. We are to partake and to cleanse out the leavened bread from our midst that we might be unleavened. Christ is the Firstfruits of those who sleep. The Spirit is poured out upon the Day of Pentecost.

But there are three festivals of the Jewish calendar—Leviticus 23, God's calendar of time—that have not yet been fulfilled in the experience of the Church. These are the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement which comes ten days afterwards, and five days after that, the Feast of

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Tabernacles. It is these unfulfilled feasts that the Church, along with the Jewish nation, looks toward completion.

Joel said, “Blow the trumpet in Zion. The day of the LORD is coming.” The final prophetic idea: that God will come for His people, and there will be a final ingathering and a complete harvest, which is what Tabernacles talks about. And Day of Atonement talks about there being a fountain for cleansing open in the house of David. And Jesus says that He will send His angels out with a trumpet, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. And He will come down, and He will tabernacle with His people and they with Him. The Scriptures themselves look forward to this final consummation of what God has done from the beginning of time—and His dealings with man unto the end. We’re a part of this.

You may be at a junction in your life. The crises of life, as they come to us, are important. They hold great meaning and promise. But behind all the crises of our lives, behind the timeline of our life itself, there is an eternal, overarching purpose of God—from whom we come, in whom we live, to whom we go. If you start from the base that the world began by chance, then you have the conclusion that it will end by chance—some madman pushing a button somewhere. But if, on the other hand, you understand with the Scriptures that God created all things, you understand that what He creates, He maintains. And what He maintains, He will complete. And God has a perfect plan for human history, in which, now, in this life, in your life, you are a part. You may be part of that generation that sees the fulfillment of what Paul is dreaming of here—so all Israel will be saved.

But whether you are a part of that generation or not, for you this is the last generation. For you, there is no other generation. For you, in your lifetime, will meet God through death or the Rapture, I don’t know which. But you will meet Him. God’s purposes are going on and on. And everything that God has started, He will complete. So if He’s called you to do a task, if He’s laid

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it upon your heart, do it in faithfulness to Him. For He will bring you to completion, just like He will bring Israel to completion. And He who loved His ancient people loves also every one of His people who have been grafted into His Tree of Life. And He will love you with an eternal love. Praise God for His wisdom and His knowledge. His ways which are intractable, past finding out.

Closing Prayer

There are moments, our heavenly Father, when in human life we wish we could get You all figured out. That we could understand everything that's happening to us right as it is happening, rather than having to wait for the answer to unfold. We take this Scripture today—for it sheds to us real light on Your ways, and it gives to us real courage in our walk. You, with Your divine wisdom and power, will finish everything perfectly. And we have an opportunity, through faith, to be grafted into Your purposes. Lord, as a branch that is grafted into the tree, we pray that there will not come severing or injury to the branch so that the life which flows from the roots up the tree into the branch will be cut off because of our own disobedience and hardness of heart. But that we will see this as an exhortation to follow You—not as an invitation to argue about election, but as an admonition to continue in faith and perseverance to You. We realize through this message today, our heavenly Father, that You are the divine Hound of Heaven. You track after us. You follow. So that when we come to You, none of us can boast of salvation and say we did it on our own. But it was Your Holy Spirit sent to us who brought us unto yourself. We praise You for that.

We would be remiss, in a moment like this—after emphasizing what You have done and what You intend to do with Israel—if we did not also, in these moments pray, for the nation of Israel. It has been gathered back in unbelief, and we do not, from this vantage point, know exactly how this fits in to Your prophetic calendar. We know that the prophets speak of Israel being gathered,

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also, in belief. Although there is much we do not understand, we understand this: That it is Your will that none should perish, but that all should have everlasting life. So we pray today especially for those who—in Israel and Russia and New York City and Miami and other centers of Jewish influence in this world—are part of the believing remnant who are bearing witness to You, that there would be, Lord, a turning to You and that the nation of Israel would, in these days, come forth as an evangelist to the Name of Jesus the Messiah. Let there be a grafting back into the branch, and let our own attitudes toward the people of the Jewish race be such as that of the apostles and of You. A love, rather than a hatred, a giving of life so that they may know You and become zealous for You because of the example of our faith and love.

Bless each one who is here today. Whatever need they're facing in their own life, You are here with a very present supply of assistance for them, and we thank You. In Jesus' Name. Amen.