Evergreen Presbyterian Church

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November 15, 2026

Sermon Title: A Remnant by Grace

Sermon Text: Romans 11:1-10

Rom. 11:1 ¶ I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

Rom. 11:2 God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel?

Rom. 11:3 "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life."

Rom. 11:4 But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

Rom. 11:5 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

Rom. 11:6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

Rom. 11:7 ¶ What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened,

Rom. 11:8 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."

Rom. 11:9 ¶ And David says,

> "Let their table become a snare and a trap,

a stumbling block and a retribution for them;
Rom. 11:10 let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see,
and bend their backs forever."

Main Point: When faith seems fragile and numbers seem small, God's people are kept by the relentless mercy of his electing grace.

Outline:

1. God's Remnant Within Israel (11:1-4)
2. The Remnant is by Grace (11:5-6)
3. Presumption as a Snare (11:7-10)

Introduction

Last we gave our full attention to the fact that even though Jesus Christ was preached to them for their entire existence as a people, the people of Israel have by and large not come flooding into Christ's church. And what we saw was that their unbelief wasn't because they just didn't know… they'd never heard… the problem of unbelief was more personal because it came from the heart. They did not come to Christ because they didn't *love* Christ or *believe* the gospel.

And that passage still ended on a hard note, because it ended with those words in 10:21: "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people." And to be honest, that's a pretty grim place to end on! And with the Bible of course, whenever you read something grim, the answer is always to just keep reading.

Because in spite of what I just said about Israel's unbelief, Paul isn't hopeless, and he keeps going. Last week his question was, "Has God forgotten his people? Has he ignored his people?" And today he asks a different question, then: "Has God *rejected* his people?"

Here's why this matters: if the answer to this question is "Yes, he has rejected his people" then the whole Gospel crumbles. It would mean that the unchangeability

and faithfulness of God would be destroyed. It would imply that God changes and that he breaks his promises.

If God can be consistent with himself and reject a people he promised himself to it would mean that the very foundations that the Gospel are built upon, and that our assurance is founded on would evaporate. It would mean that grace is overthrown and is replaced by merit. We would have a God who loves us when we're worthy and turns us away when we're not. Instead of a gospel of God's free grace, we would have a message that God gives us what we deserve (which would be horrible news for sinners).

Now, that's the set-up, of course. But Paul's whole agenda here today is to answer the question of whether God has rejected his people by saying, "By no means! God hasn't changed, he won't change, his election can't be thwarted, and his covenant is solid because God is faithful to his own promises. He sees them through to the end."

In the coming weeks, we're going to enter into Paul's argument and explanation that God keeps his promises and does not change. This week, we're going to look at the first part of Paul's approach here.

1. God's Remnant Within Israel (11:1-4)

So first we need to begin with God's remnant *within* Israel.

So in verse 1 Paul doesn't leave us in suspense: "Has God rejected his people? By no means!" He starts the argument with himself. He says, "Look: if God had rejected his people, then how could *I* be saved; after all, I'm an Israelite!"

It's not a bad argument. It's really simple, isn't it? "If God rejected Israelites completely then how did I get here?"

You might still want to argue, trying to explain why so many Jews haven't come into the church: "Well okay, he hasn't rejected *all* Israelites. After all, I grant you, Paul is saved. But the really violent ones who reject Jesus and the Christian message… that's a bridge too far."

But when he points to himself he shoots down that argument too, doesn't he? "If you have someone like me who was a violent persecutor of the church, breathing out threats against the church, then is there really anyone who has sinned so much that they can't receive God's grace?"

So think about it: if Paul's hostility to Christ isn't a sufficient a barrier, then biological lineage and past rebellion can't be barriers to God's election, either. We have to see that God is saving people from within ethnic Israel: even the nastiest individuals from within the Jewish people.

Now, Paul does clear some things up. He says in verse 2, "God has not rejected his people *whom he foreknew*." In other words, the whole people of Israel haven't been rejected. But that doesn't mean that they're all saved. When he says he hasn't rejected those whom he foreknew, he's telling us that God has promised himself to those within Israel *whom he foreknew*, whom he foreloved, whom he set his election upon. *That* is the people he hasn't rejected.

He's got a remnant. A group within the body that he's marked off.

Paul illustrates this from the story of the Prophet Elijah. This is not just random story-telling time. He turns to the story of Elijah because his readers are sort of trapped in a crisis of the present moment. They look around at first-century Jerusalem, Judea, and the Jewish diaspora throughout the Roman world, and what they saw was widespread rejection of Jesus. And they conclude that the covenant was broken by these people, and so the covenant was also broken by God.

And so what Paul does is, he tears that thinking down by going back to 1 Kings 19 when all sorts of horrible things were happening within Israel. Ahab and Jezebel engaged in state-sponsored idolatry. Altars to Yahweh were torn down, prophets were hunted and murdered. Any outward, visible adherence to the covenant had essentially collapsed. As far as anyone could tell, Israel had fallen away *completely*. And that's a feeling that Paul could relate to.

But Paul uses this episode in Elijah's life because it turns out, God's covenant didn't actually perish under Ahab. God's covenant was never tied to the visible majority because even back then God had reserved for himself a people within

Israel who hadn't done these things, and who hadn't bowed their knee to false gods.

Elijah hears God's correction: "I have kept for myself seven thousand men" (v. 4). And Paul wants us to hear the same correction as we're thinking about Israel's unbelief: "I have kept for *myself* seven thousand." He's talking about a remnant within Israel. And this remnant exists because of God. God is the reason they are there. God is the one who has done this. It's his doing.

If I could make an application for us here, I would just point out that we can get into Elijah's mindset as well. We can't see what God is doing. And so we feel discouraged or disappointed. But God's people are out there. In Elijah's day, his remnant was quiet, and being preserved out of sight.

Do you ever do this? You go out in public and since you live in Portland you think you'll never meet another Christian? Yesterday my wife came home from the store and told me that she met a cashier who was a Christian. He said he desperately wants to go to church, but the grocery store he works at never gives him Sundays off. She came home and told me about this. You know why? Because it surprises us when we run into another Christian. "I saw a Christian today!"

God has a remnant. He has people in this city. People who might have a chance to come to church, by the way, if we didn't shop or eat out on Sundays. (I'm sorry! Hobby horse!)

God has a people. And only he knows that true number. The elect aren't hidden from God. The truth doesn't depend on us, and isn't measured by what we can see, either. Man, do we need that encouragement.

2. The Remnant is by Grace (11:5-6)

Second, Paul shows us that the remnant exists only by grace.

We mentioned this back in Romans 9, but I think it bears repeating. It is very tempting to think that the remnant within Israel that Paul is talking about here are chosen on the basis of something worthy *in them*. We think, "Well the 7000 that

God reserved for himself didn't bow the knee, and that's why God chose them. He wanted the non-knee bowers." When we do that, we totally invert God's grace.

The reason they didn't bow the knee to Baal was because God was gracious to them. He wasn't gracious because they were good. They were good because he was gracious! He takes credit for the 7000 who didn't bow the knee. He says, "I kept for myself" these people. He doesn't say, "I found them," he doesn't say, "I know about them," or "I saw them." He says, "*I* kept them"!

Think of it: Paul is *one* of this remnant. Could anyone argue that a murdering, persecuting man had something good within him that made him worthy of saving? No. This is about grace. He's one of the 7000 and was saved simply because of the kindness and grace of God.

Being part of the remnant doesn't give a reason for pride. If God treated Israel like they deserved, he would never have shown any kindness to them from the very beginning.

> He could have walked away at the foot of Mount Sinai, when they made the golden calf and danced around the idol that they invented.
>
> He could have abandoned them when they voted to march back to Egypt instead of trusting his promise.
>
> He could have blotted them out during the time of the Judges, when every man did what was right in his own eyes.
>
> He could have rejected them during the time of Ahab and Jezebel.
>
> And he could have cut them off forever in Babylon, when their idolatry caught up to them.

Over and over again, he could have given them what they deserved. And the fact that they continued existing at all was evidence that God treated Israel with grace and not according to what they deserved. At every single juncture, justice should have demanded that this people be put out of their misery. And instead, sovereign mercy repeatedly stepped between Israel and the wrath that they deserved.

And so here Paul includes himself in this remnant. And they *might* be tempted to brag: "There's something we did that caused us to deserve mercy." But if you

deserve mercy, then it's not mercy. It's just getting what you deserve. The remnant were sinners too. They included murderers and persecutors after all. They weren't chosen because they were better, wiser, or more faithful. They were chosen because God decided to take pity on them.

That's why Paul says, "There is a remnant, chosen by grace. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would not be grace."

The believing remnant within Israel needs to know: yes you are saved by grace, so there's no room to boast.

3. Presumption as a Snare (11:7-10)

Third, Paul shows us the snare that presumptuousness presents.

There's a sense in which what we have in verses 7-10 is the other side of the coin we were looking at in the first six verses of this passage. What we just saw was that God hasn't rejected his people, but has a remnant chosen by his own electing grace.

But… that has a flipside. If you're reading you might ask, "Fine, Paul. God has reserved a remnant of his own elect within Israel. But what about *the rest*? If God is faithful to Israel, why are the overwhelming majority of Israelites blind to their own Messiah?" If Paul stopped at verse 6, the skeptic could probably argue that God's covenant has failed for 95% of the people it was given to.

So in verse 7, Paul says, "What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking."

Paul is showing us the real nature of the covenant: The covenant promise was never an undifferentiated guarantee to every biological descendant of Abraham. If *that* was the promise, then *any* unbelief would be proof that the promise was broken. Instead, the promise was always directed to the elect within Israel.

And what this means is that the unbelief of the non-elect within Israel doesn't falsify the promise. Because the promise was never for them.

Paul knows that unbelief is real. He knows that not everyone within Israel are obeying the Gospel. He knows it too well. But why?

Well, Paul says those who are in the remnant are chosen by grace. So election is how he accounts for believing Jews.

But he says, "the rest" were hardened. When he says "the rest," he is talking about non-elect Jews who weren't part of the remnant.

Now, we spoke about this doctrine of hardening already back in Romans 9, but I want to again remind you: even when God hardens, he doesn't harden *against* our desires. That's why Pharaoh is hardened by God *and* why he hardens himself: he wants to resist. He has motivations and desires that contradict God's commands. So he hardens himself and it's his doing. But it is also God's doing.

And *here*, Paul does something similar: he is diagnosing the unbelief of those he calls "the rest" within Israel; those who don't believe. How does he diagnose it?

Verse 9 gives Paul's explanation: he says it is "their table" that becomes the trap. This is odd language, perhaps. What does he mean by "their table"?

Well, someone's table is where we put the things that feed and provide for us. A table is a place of nourishment. A table is where you have fellowship and connect and gather your strength. And God gave them a table. Think of what was on that table.

God gave the Jews circumcision, the temple, the priesthood, the covenants, the dietary laws, the scriptures. For "the rest" which Paul is diagnosing here, all of those things became an idol and took the place of God in their hearts. It is so much easier to do, to practice, to observe, than it is to put down your pride and live in daily grace from God.

So instead of placing their faith in Christ, their faith ended up being in the ceremonies themselves; in their religious privileges instead of Christ, who gave them their gifts… who gave them that table. And that table went from being a blessing to being a trap.

Christian, this is not an opportunity for you to judge the Jews. Don't think you're better than this. Presuming on religious privilege is a basic fallen human pasttime. Christians can also do this.

Think of all the good things that God has given to *us* as a church. Spiritual laziness can come upon any of us. We can focus on the outward and neglect the heart. Think about it: God has given us the means of grace: the word, sacraments, and prayer. Those means of grace are good. But do you think that we can't figure out how to take these good, glorious, gracious gifts and twist them, too? Oh we can!

We are a Reformed church. It's so tempting to take the doctrines of grace which are meant to humble us and turn them into a reason for pride, looking down on churches that don't believe them or teach them.

It's tempting to hold true doctrine close to ourselves and to make it our identity, and to make it the reason why we know this church is better than others.

It's tempting to make the fact that we have been baptized something that makes us feel superior to others. Our baptism should make us glad. But does it make us proud?

It's tempting to come to the Lord's Table, and instead of seeing it as the grace of God… instead of seeing the Supper as God's grace, we do it so regularly that we start to forget that it's by grace… over time we can find ourselves thinking, "Well of course I should come to this table." We forget God's grace and start thinking this is what we deserve. We forget that Jesus meets us here as we behold him by faith.

The moment we assume we are safe before God because of our church involvement, sound theology, or upright lives, our table becomes a snare, too.

It happened before to Israel. It can happen to the church.

What's the remedy? How do we keep this from happening?

Part of the answer is to diagnose what's going on. Spiritual laziness is very easy to drift into. We incrementally drift into spiritual apathy, we compromise, we start to crave comfort. Dorothy Sayers says that sloth is so easy to give in to because it isn't about physical laziness and inactivity. We can be busy, AND have an inordinate craving for ease, entertainment, and comfort. Slothfulness happens when we stop caring about eternal things and find our purpose in our own comfort and self-preservation.

Have you fallen into sloth? Have you given into spiritual laziness? Are the ceremonies and means of grace becoming a crutch that you lean on without actually depending on Jesus? It can happen. It has happened before.

When spiritual laziness comes our way, we often have to be forcibly jarred out of it. What the church needs is a fresh vision of Jesus Christ and a renewed love of the gospel. And often God jars us back to that with the cross of affliction.

Listen to how Peter Martyr says this:

> "Persecution, famine, exile, disgrace, and death itself become gifts of grace, because Christ has sanctified the cross for us... God often uses the severe mercy of the cross to bring us back to genuine repentance and spiritual correction."

It's tough for us to think of suffering as a gift, but suffering does something to us that we almost never plan for ourselves because we wouldn't choose it. Suffering forces our eyes away from our comforts and achievements and drives us back to Christ alone.

When God does this for us, He is protecting us from falling into the same madness "the rest" of Israel fell into.

Conclusion

Look back to verse 4 one more time.

In this verse, God ministers to the Elijah and he says, "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." The church has times when it seems weakened and less popular than other times. Sometimes that is because we have rose colored glasses, and sometimes it is because there really has been a decline. These things seem to ebb and flow.

But God tells us, "I have kept for myself seven thousand." The Church's survival doesn't depend on outward visibility or majorities.

Do the number seem small? Don't despair. On the flipside of that, don't wait *until* the church seems to be growing in order to feel confident in the gospel.

Don’t let your hope change with the season. Instead, believe the Lord when he says that he never forsakes his promises. He never abandons his covenant. And most importantly, none of this hinges on us. It’s all from him and through him and to him. Every bit of it is all from grace, totally undeserved, simply because our God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.

Let’s pray.