

Romans 10:18-11:6. ¹⁸ But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." ¹⁹ Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding." ²⁰ And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." ²¹ But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ² 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: ³ "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? ⁴ And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." ⁵ So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

In Grace God Reaches out to Undeserving People

- 1. He reached out to a nation who rejected him.**
- 2. He reaches out to the nations who reject him still.**

It is a sad and telling passage in the middle of a powerful section of Scripture. In the striking opening of John's gospel, as he marvels in poetic verse that the Light of the world came to bring light and life to this world lost in darkness; that the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us; in the midst of this powerful section of Scripture John also utters this heartbreaking sentence. ***¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. (John 11:1).***

Jesus was the Jewish born Messiah sent to God's chosen people. He was the one for whom the people had waited. For so many years they waited for that promised Messiah from the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They listened to the prophets describe him. They heard the word explaining what kind of Savior he would be. They waited for this promised son of David and yet when he finally came they rejected him.

The story in our Gospel lesson for today is somewhat of a microcosm of how the Jewish nation received Jesus - or perhaps better said how they rejected Jesus. The people of Nazareth heard him speak. They were impressed by his ability as a teacher. They admired his passion and even praised the authority with which he spoke, but in the end so many rejected him. They could not accept that he was divine. After all, wasn't this Joseph's son? Jesus did not fit their idea of who the Savior should be. They rejected him. The people of Nazareth even went so far as to run him out of town in order to throw him off a cliff.

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. It's sad enough to think that an entire town rejected Jesus; it is downright heartbreaking to think that an entire group of people, by in large, rejected Jesus back then and still, generations later, rejects him today.

Perhaps some among the Gentiles in Rome were wondering what kind of message Paul was preaching if most of the Jews had rejected it. After all, Jesus was a Jew. They had rejected their own and now Paul was taking this message from the Jews and bringing it to them. Why should the rest of the world listen to this message about a Jewish Messiah when most of the Jews didn't even listen? And now that message was passing over God's chosen people to the people of other nations. Why should the rest of this world follow a God who had seemed to forsake his chosen people?

As Paul writes to the Romans he shows them that God did not forsake his chosen people, but they had forsaken him. Paul then used this rejection to teach those in Rome about the grace and mercy of God. In his great love God patiently reached out to people of Israel over and over again. In his grace he would reach out to others even when his own people rejected him.

God had given his promise of a Messiah to Adam, he had renewed the promise to Noah, confirmed it to Abraham and passed it down through the people of Israel. He promised the people he would be faithful, but he warned them that the promise could be lost if they were unfaithful. Paul points out that God spoke already through Moses, warning this proud and self-righteous nation of Israel that his Word, his promise, would be taken from them if they continued to reject him. Moses prophesied that eventually this chosen nation of Israel would be envious of those who were not a nation, that is, everyone that is not from his chosen nation but rather from other places and lands – the Gentiles. (*Deuteronomy 32:21*) For God's message, his promise of the Messiah, and God's love would all be given to others and the nation of Israel would be left in the dark. Because they rejected God's love God would take away that message which was given and preserved in such a special way through the Jewish nation, and God would spread it out throughout the world.

Paul also spoke about how God would express his anguish over their habitual rejection of him through the prophet Isaiah. ***"All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people" (Isaiah 65:2).*** God would continue to reach out to them. He is slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. Like a Father God cared for his children Israel. Over and over he reached out to them. In love he called them to himself, but they refused.

God's grace was abundant his love enduring. His love was so great it had to be shared. If the message was to be rejected in one place it must go on to others, so that the nations may know the grace of God and be saved. And so God told his people through the prophet Isaiah, ***"I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me" (Isaiah 65:1).***

Who was to blame for this rejection? Was it God? By no means! God did not reject his people. His people rejected him. Paul adds strength to his argument as he goes on to sight a historical account of Elijah. And even Elijah - this great hero of the Jews the man who so many Jewish people held (and still hold) in such high regard - even Elijah, told God to destroy the people of Israel for their rebellion and rejection (*1 Kings 19*). God, however, in his grace and

mercy, refused. In his reply to Elijah God spoke of the power and the effectiveness of his saving word. He showed how he is a God of love bestowing his mercy even on those who didn't deserve it. He is God full of grace. The Lord said to Elijah. ***"I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal" (1 Kings 19:18).***

A major factor that led many of the Jewish people to reject Jesus was that they lived in a culture that did not want such a Messiah. They lived among leaders who had their minds made up about who God was and what he wanted. It's sad to think that because of this culture, this mindset, a whole race of people, many, many Jewish people, rejected Jesus back then and still reject Jesus today; just because he wasn't the kind of Messiah that they were looking for.

The state of American Christianity today makes you wonder about the culture that we live in, and what influence it has on the way people view God and his word. Our nation prides itself as a nation of free and independent thinkers. We live in a culture that is very scientific, very rational. One of our nation's most influential founding fathers had such a rational mind and he used that rational approach as he dealt with scripture and as read about Jesus.

In the latter part of his life Thomas Jefferson put together a book that was entitled: *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* or perhaps as it is better known *The Jefferson Bible*. Jefferson compiled these teachings of Jesus by using a razor blade and cutting out numerous sections from the New Testament and pasting them together to better suit his beliefs. Jefferson's condensed version of the Bible is especially notable for its exclusion of all the miracles of Jesus and most mentions of the supernatural. Most notably he excluded sections concerning the resurrection and passages that indicated that Jesus was divine.

Jefferson most likely composed this book for his own satisfaction, but it seems many in America have followed his example. Whether consciously following Jefferson's lead or not, many Christians in this nation handle the word of God in a similar way. They might not take a razor blade to Scripture, but people figuratively cut and paste all the time. Even seminaries in this nation regularly teach pastors to ignore or explain away the sections of Scripture that teach that Jesus was divine. Many people who consider themselves Christians promote the teachings of Christ and yet side step his miracles. Many people in this nation praise the virtues of Jesus as a man and a teacher but they reject him as true God. Many also go on to practice selective hearing when it comes to the rest of God's Word and his commands. We live in a culture in a society where has become acceptable for people fashion for themselves a God with which they feel more comfortable. We live in culture that allows, that even trains people to manipulate God's Word to suit their own desires. It may not seem like it at first glance, but because of those who practice such selective hearing of God's Word may find themselves numbered with the many in this nation that flat out reject Jesus as their Savior.

God warns us in His Word that we should not add or subtract from his word. If we skip over sections of the Bible that don't fit how we picture God this is no longer the Holy Bible, but rather it is simply a book with a bunch of holes in it. If we change who Jesus is; if we make him out to be less than God, if Jesus is just a great teacher that we are supposed to emulate what happens to grace. As Paul says, then ***grace would no longer be grace (Romans 4:6.)***

I think we all can recall from John chapter 3 that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son to save the world. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it. If Jesus is simply a teacher to admire, simply an example we must follow, we are still in our sins

and we are very much condemned. We cannot follow his perfect example, because we cannot keep the commandments.

God in his undeserved love sent his Son into this world not to condemn the world, but God came to this world to save sinners. Jesus was not only a great teacher, but he was also true God. He lived a perfect life in our place and died as our sinless sacrifice. Jesus was the sinless Son of God, who taught with authority, performed miracles, and in the greatest miraculous feat of them all was raised from the dead. This might fly in the face of conventional wisdom. *What kind of God would love us so much that he would come to be our Savior?!* This might fly in the face of scientific reason. *How is this even possible?!* But just because our rational minds reject God's grace doesn't mean it is not true. Just because our rational minds naturally reject this good news doesn't mean that God's powerful word can't change our hearts and bring us to faith. And that's what he does. God in his gracious love and abundant mercy puts his powerful word in our ears and gently places saving faith into our hearts.

God reaches out to his people through his word; faith comes from hearing this message. But we must be careful that we do not water down, or change, and therefore reject this saving Word. For it is not just founding fathers, liberal seminaries, and social cultures that lead people into changing God's Word and refashioning for themselves who God is. Our rational minds may naturally question the miraculous, rule out the supernatural, and doubt our divine God and his saving Word. Our sinful flesh may be very selective in what parts of God's Word we recall and listen to and follow. Yet, in his undeserved love for us God continues to reach out his arms of grace to us, even when we reject his Word. His Word endures. His Word remains. In his patient love and mercy God preserves his pure word, he blesses us with a faithful few who hold to its true teaching and proclaim it faithfully, and then God sends out his Holy Spirit so that this powerful means of grace may work on our hearts and conquers our unbelief.

The Jewish people rejected him but God in his grace and his mercy still reached out to them. God sent his prophets. He also sent his Son. In grace Jesus went to synagogue after synagogue and he taught the Word of God. He preached the good news of God's grace, of free salvation to God's chosen people. When they rejected him he shared his love with others. After Jesus was arrested by Jewish leaders, condemned by a Jewish Sanhedrin, and cursed by a crowd of Jewish people in love he forgave them. And after Jesus was gone from this earth the apostles would follow the same pattern that their teacher had shown them. They went to the synagogues. They reached out in love to God's chosen people who had rejected their Savior. Numerous times we hear in the book of Acts Paul going first to a Jewish synagogue to preach before he went anywhere else. The Jews had rejected and killed the Savior of the world, and yet God in love reached out to them and saved some. He preserved for himself a remnant, a faithful few. In his abundant grace God sent also his saving word out into the rest of the world.

It is sad to think that the culture in our nation and around the world puts so many barriers up to believing in Jesus. It is sad to consider how entire nations are lost in false beliefs because somewhere down the line they rejected the true God. It's sad to think about how many times we fall into such selective hearing of God's Word and reject our Lord and Savior. In his undeserved love, that wonderful love we call grace, God reaches out with his gracious arms, even to those who reject him. He sends his Word out into the world. He sends his Word into our hearts. What a gracious God we have! Let us rejoice that God reaches out and saves and loves such undeserving people. Amen.