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Sermon Notes

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God Gave Israel Its Spiritual Blindness

Romans 11:7-10

Introduction

Paul ascribes some things to God in this passage that the human mind cannot comprehend, would never have thought to ascribe to God

Here Paul claims that the shocking failure of the Jews to see Jesus Christ as their Messiah is due to the direct actions of God

Context:

Key Question of Romans 9-11: Why is Israel rejecting their own Messiah, despite all the obvious evidence that Jesus is the Christ?

First answer: Romans 9:6 Divine election

Second answer: Romans 9:30-33 Israel pursued righteousness unrighteously

Salvation is a simple gift of God through faith in Christ

It is available to anyone, Jew or Gentile who trusts in Christ, who calls on the name of the Lord

Romans 11: Paul's final answer to this immense problem

- 1) God Has Not Rejected ALL of Israel: Paul is a Jewish Believer
- 2) God Has Reserved a Remnant, as He Always Has
- 3) God Has Hardened the Rest of Israel, as He Said He Would
- 4) Israel's Hardening is part of God's Eternal Plan... for Two Purpose
- 5) First, that the Gentiles Might Be Saved
- 6) Second, that the Jews Might Be Humbled
- 7) Ultimately, "All Israel will be saved" = the nation of Israel and the Elect of Israel will be the same at the end

I. Israel's Stupor and Blindness

- A. Paul's Call by God: Ananias told that Paul would suffer greatly in his attempts to witness to the Jews
- B. Paul's Evangelistic History with Israel: In every city Paul faced hostility by the Jews: from Damascus to Jerusalem to Rome
- C. So, Too, At the Present Time

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

- 1. Today the same phenomena is true
- 2. Some Jews hear the gospel of Christ and believe
- 3. BUT Most Jews reject the gospel
- 4. Most Jews today are secular
- D. Deepest Issue: The Old Testament Does Not Speak Christ to Them
 - 1. They do not see Christ in Isaiah 53
 - 2. They do not see Christ in Daniel 7
 - 3. Before Christ, the Jewish Rabbinic writings saw Messiah in these passages
 - 4. Jesus saw this phenomena during His ministry
 - 5. Paul says a "veil" is over their hearts whenever Moses is read
 - 6. The question is: WHY??? Paul's answer is DEEP and SHOCKING to many people

II. Israel's Stupor and Blindness Caused by God

Romans 11:7-8 What then? What Israel sought so earnestly it did not obtain, but the elect did. The others were hardened, ⁸ 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."

- A. Hardening Mentioned in Romans 9
- B. "God Gave Them": The Key Concept

1. The difficult part to accept: This hardening comes ultimately from God Himself
 2. Yes, Israel had hard hearts and blind eyes and deaf ears through their own unbelief and sin
 3. Yes, Satan is the “god of this age” who blinds the eyes of unbelievers so they cannot see Christ
 4. BUT Paul here ascribes it ultimately to God Himself:
- C. Paul’s Answer to the Grief of Jewish Rebellion: God’s Mysterious Sovereign Purpose

III. Israel’s Stupor and Blindness Caused by God’s Blessings

A. God’s Table of Blessings for Israel

1. Paul quotes one of David’s many “curse” Psalms
 - a. “David and His Enemies” a major theme in the Psalms
 - b. “Curse” Psalms are generally not personal... David himself was very gracious to his enemies, again and again
 - c. These Psalms represent God’s stance to those who will never receive His grace... it is a plea to God to act on the wicked who reject His grace
 - d. This Psalm is 69, which all the Jews recognized as containing Messianic prophecies: “Zeal for your house has consumed me” and

Psalm 69:21 They also gave me gall for my food And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

2. The “Table” here represents God’s blessings to Israel
 - a. Physical blessings: a land flowing with milk and honey, served on a laden table of blessings for the Jews

Psalm 23:5 -6 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

- b. Even more... Spiritual blessings: the “table” represents Israel’s rich spiritual heritage—the sacrificial system, with all its symbolism

Numbers 4:7 And over the table of the bread of the Presence they shall spread a cloth of blue and put on it the plates, the dishes for incense, the bowls, and the flagons for the drink offering; the regular show bread also shall be on it.

Malachi 1:7, 12 [these passages call the animal sacrificial system of the temple “The Lord’s Table”]

The “Table of the Lord” in the Old Covenant was the sacrificial system, their temple worship that was meant to be a rich source of blessing to Israel

B. The Table Becomes a Snare and Trap

Romans 11:9 And David says: "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them.

1. The Israelites trusted in their blessings and grew fat and hardened against God
 - a. They trusted in the Table of the Lord and turned away from the Lord of the Table... they trusted in the Temple, and thought God would never abandon their place of holy worship

Jeremiah 7:4 Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!"

- i) When the Lord came and fulfilled the temple sacrificial system, they should have let it go
- ii) Instead they clung to the Old Covenant table of the Lord, and refused the Master of the Feast, Jesus Christ

Instead of embracing the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world, they clung to the Temple itself and to the sacrificial system, and angrily stoned Christ’s messenger Stephen, who predicted that the time would come when Israel would no longer need the animal sacrifices or the Temple itself... Christ’s atonement at the cross had made that table of the Lord obsolete

Acts 6:13-14 they produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. ¹⁴ For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

- b. They trusted also in their physical blessings and turned entirely to other gods
 - i) When Israel was led by God out of Egypt and through the desert, they knew there was no other god but the true God

- ii) But when they entered the Promised Land and conquered all their enemies, they settled into a life of comfort and ease
 - iii) Then, they quickly forgot God and in their ease and comfort and affluence they turned away from God and experimented with exotic gods the way food connoisseurs experiment with exotic dishes and wine tasters with exotic mixtures of wine: they tried new gods, and new religions... and they used the material blessings of god to worship those new gods
2. They were arrogant and forgot God who gave them their blessings
 3. God warned Israel twice about the dangers of comfort and ease in the promised land
 - a. First, Deuteronomy 8

Deuteronomy 8:7-19 the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land-- a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; ⁸ a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; ⁹ a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills. ¹⁰ When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹ Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹² Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹⁵ He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. ¹⁶ He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. ¹⁷ You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." ¹⁸ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today. ¹⁹ If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed.

Israel's table became a snare to them when they stopped heeding God's warning about prosperity and ease... they forgot God when their table was laden with His rich blessings

b. Second the Song of Moses

The "Song of Moses" predicted Israel's rebellion:

Deuteronomy 31:19-22 *"Now write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them. ²⁰ When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their forefathers, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting me and breaking my covenant. ²¹ And when many disasters and difficulties come upon them, this song will testify against them, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants. I know what they are disposed to do, even before I bring them into the land I promised them on oath." ²² So Moses wrote down this song that day and taught it to the Israelites.*

Key section:

Deuteronomy 32:12-15 *LORD alone guided him, no foreign god was with him. ¹³ He made him ride on the high places of the land, and he ate the produce of the field, and he suckled him with honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock. ¹⁴ Curds from the herd, and milk from the flock, with fat of lambs, rams of Bashan and goats, with the very finest of the wheat- and you drank foaming wine made from the blood of the grape. ¹⁵ "But Jeshurun [Israel] grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation.*

c. The prophets warned them again and again of their ease and their idols

Amos 6:1-7 *Woe to you who are complacent in Zion, and to you who feel secure on Mount Samaria, you notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come! ... You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. ⁵ You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. ⁶ You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. ⁷ Therefore you will be among the first to go into exile; your feasting and lounging will end.*

4. Even worse, they did not realize the blessings of the Lord's table were meant to bring them to Christ as the ultimate fulfillment...

Romans 2:4 *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*

C. God Hardened Israel by the Blessings He Gave Them

1. The Jews were given overwhelming spiritual and material advantages
2. But by choosing not to transform their hearts, God hardened the Jews by means of the very blessings He had lavished on them
3. Their spiritual blessings made them nationalistic and prideful, and they refused to consider that Christ had come for their sins

4. Their material blessings made them fat and lazy and complacent and willing to experiment with false gods... and made them forget the true God

Question: How can blessings be a source of hardening?

Illus. Sunshine both melts wax and hardens clay

So also blessings melt the hearts of God's people and harden those who are not

God's elect realize God's blessings are given for them to enjoy WITH THANKFULNESS, and so that they may be shared with the poor and needy. We also have come to realize that God gives us wealth that we may use it to gain friends for the Kingdom

BUT when God's blessings cause us to turn away from Him and love the gift more than the giver, they become a stumbling block and a snare

D. David's Curse: Stumbling, Trapped, Blind, and Bent

Romans 11:9-10 "May their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them. ¹⁰ May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever."

1. The curse of Psalm 69 is dire and devastating
2. Israel is cursed with stumbling, with being trapped, with being blind, and with backs bent forever

Illus. Snare = a trap with bait... perhaps a noose designed to tighten around the gazelle's slender leg as they nibble at the bait...

The TABLE OF BLESSINGS ends us what snared Israel into rejecting Christ

Perhaps that is what is still an issue... material prosperity and success and power and earthly blessings fill up the hearts of many unbelieving Jews and they feel no need whatsoever for Christ

3. Paul's point is that it comes from the unsearchable, mysterious plan of a sovereign God!
4. Next time, God willing, we will try to understand God's purpose in hardening the Jews against Christ

IV. Application

A. Accept the "Things Revealed": God's Sovereign Plan

1. John Piper on American pragmatism and arrogance
2. God has revealed His sovereignty over human salvation

3. We must embrace it and delight in it... even if we cannot fathom all the details

B. Be Humbled by God's Sovereign Plan

1. God's ultimate purpose is to save both Jews and Gentiles in such a way that they cannot possibly boast in anything of themselves
2. The better we understand God's sovereignty in salvation, the more humble we should be and will be
3. Know that, if you are a Christian, it is only by God's sovereign grace... give Him all the glory for it!!
4. Also, be humbled in that you cannot fathom what God is doing with the Jews... His plan is too deep!

C. Be Secure in God's Sovereign Plan

D. Be Warned: Do Not Let Your Table Become a Stumbling Block to You

1. America is in the very same position as Israel materially and spiritually
2. We need to heed the warning of Deuteronomy 8: Beware lest, when you are enriched by all the blessings of this good land, your heart will become dull and hard towards God... you will become arrogant and spiritually dull... full of food and entertainment and pleasure and comfort and ease, and making plans for more and more of the same... **BUT CHRIST YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN**
3. Romans 11:11-28 is a warning to Gentile believers: **DO NOT BECOME ARROGANT TOWARD GOD OR TOWARD THE JEWS...**
4. We American Christians need to be serious about repentance
 - a. We are the wealthiest nation in the history of the world
 - b. We have a veritable river of blessings flowing onto our tables
 - c. We have food in abundance, money in abundance, houses, cars, clothing
 - d. We have wealthy neighbors and friends and relatives who can help us if our needs increase
 - e. We have first rate health care and hospitals
 - f. We have smooth roads and electricity and phone service and 911 emergency service and a stable government

- g. We have constant entertainment available... the ability literally to amuse ourselves to death
- h. We live in a beautiful secure blessed and abundant land, a land flowing with milk and honey
- i. THEREFORE: we face the exact same dangers the Jews did in their day... the danger of idolatry, of loving the gift and forgetting the giver
- j. We must beware and repent and deal seriously with ourselves
- k. We must ask ourselves if our love of money and pleasure and ease has blunted our yearning for God and His glory
- l. We must ask ourselves if we have grown fat and sleek and have forgotten God in our affluence
- m. We must come before Him with weeping and be willing to turn from selfishness and complacency and unconcern for the lost and the poor and the needy

Romans 11:20-22 Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. ²² 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.