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Sermon Notes

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God's Purpose in the Stumbling of Israel, Part 1

Romans 11:11-16

Introduction: Gustav Mahler's "Symphony of a Thousand"

Illus. Gustav Mahler's Eighth symphony, first performed in Munich on September 12, 1910, was the greatest triumph of Mahler's life. It was a complex work in two movements, the first lasted 30 minutes, the second 60 minutes. It's complexities have kept musical scholars debating for decades. It was scored for piccolo, 4 flutes, 4 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 4 bassoons, contra-bassoon, 8 horns, 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, bass tuba, 3 timpani, bass drum, cymbals, gong, triangle, bells, glockenspiel, celesta, piano, harmonium, organ, 2 harps, mandolin, strings, plus double chorus, boys' choir and 8 vocal soloists... The combined musical forces on stage did in fact number over 1000, which inspired the publisher of the score to entitle it "Symphony of A Thousand"...

And Mahler both WROTE the work AND conducted it on September 12, 1910... when it was finished, the crowd was overawed, and surged to engulf the stage

Such was the first performance of a complex and deep piece of music by a human composer

How much more God's symphony of salvation history

I. Review: Israel's Stumbling Over Christ

A. Paul's Anguish: "My Kinsmen Are Accursed"

B. Paul's Deepest Concern: Has God's Word Failed?

C. Paul's First Answer: Not All Israel Are Israel

D. Paul's Second Answer: Israel Stumbled Over the Stumbling Stone

E. Paul's Third Answer: Salvation Is by Grace for All... But Israel Rejected

F. Paul's Fourth Answer: God's Sovereign Plan in Election and Rejection

1. Israel as a whole has experienced a hardening and blinding in part, resulting in their rejection of Christ

2. This spiritual blindness comes from God Himself
3. This spiritual blindness is not universal: some individual Jews are trusting in Christ
4. This spiritual blindness is part of a complex and glorious plan
5. This spiritual blindness is temporary as far as the nation of Israel is concerned [though individual Jews die in unbelief and stand personally accountable]

II. Paul's Question: Have They Stumbled In Order to Fall?

A. What Does the Future Hold for the Nation?

1. Paul is enquiring about the future of NATIONAL ISRAEL
2. Important to make the distinction between Israelites as individuals and the nation as a whole
3. Romans 9-10 deals with individual salvation; Romans 11 with the question of Israel as a nation
 - a. Individual Jews are either elect or non-elect
 - b. Individual Jews will either accept the gospel of Christ or reject it
 - c. BUT the physical descendents of Israel as a nation... have they stumbled irrevocably?
4. Only God finally knows the future... for God alone rules the Universe
 - a. Paul's whole point in emphasizing election and rejection centered on the will of God is this: God's will will stand, and is the basis of ultimate confidence
 - b. If God were not sovereign or were merely passive, the magnificent statements Paul is about to make could never be made
5. God proclaims the future for Israel here

B. Did Israel Stumble In Order to Fall?

1. Question phrased in the negative, expecting the answer "No!!"

NASB *Romans 11:11* *I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they?*

2. Individual Jews were stumbling over the stumbling stone of Christ
3. BUT "Did they stumble SO THAT they would fall???"

4. The question probes God's purpose in Israel's stumbling
5. What is God's intent in giving Israel a spirit of stupor, blind eyes and deaf ears?
6. What is God's intent in Israel stumbling over Christ?
7. Did God intend that the nation as a whole fall out of His grace? Out of His commitment to them? Did Israel stumble so as to fall as a whole into eternal condemnation, permanently rejected by God?

C. May It Never Be!

1. Paul's answer is unequivocal and clear: MAY IT NEVER BE!!
2. The same answer he's given again and again in Romans
3. A Sense of Moral Outrage in the Answer: ABSOLUTELY NOT!!! IT IS UNTHINKABLE!!!
4. Israel is still special and set apart in God's mind and in His plans

Romans 11:28-29 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, ²⁹ for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.

"It is unthinkable that Israel stumbled for the purpose of falling out of God's purpose in election. God still has plans and a purpose for Israel."

5. Jeremiah's Famous Prophecy

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

God still has plans the nation of Israel as whole. That's what Romans 11 is about

D. Romans 11's Mystery: Israel Has a Glorious Future

Romans 11:25-27 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. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷ And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

III. God Has a Purpose in Israel's Stumbling

A. Astonishing Thought: God Has a Purpose in Israel's Transgression

1. The issue is... the Jews are rejecting Christ; they don't love Him, they don't trust Him; many still look on Him as a deceiver of the people and a disturber of the peace
2. Throughout Romans 11, Paul speaks of the PURPOSE for all this
3. This question cannot be raised except in reference to God Himself
4. The devil blinded eyes so they could not see Christ... but we cannot speak of any GOOD purpose the devil may have had in this; His purpose was made clear in John 10

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy

5. The Jews themselves hardened their own hearts and blinded their own eyes... but their purpose was nothing positive... they just refused to believe
6. When it comes to A GOOD PURPOSE FOR ISRAEL'S BLINDNESS, only God can speak like that!!
7. For people who emphasize human will too much, this question is ludicrous... "God HAS NO PURPOSE in the Jews' rejection of Christ! He desires ALL MEN to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth."
8. Well, as attractive as that may be, it does NOT line up with Romans 11
9. Evidently, there IS a good purpose in the hardening and blinding of Jews resulting in their rejection of Christ

B. Purpose Language in Romans 11

1. Layers of Purpose in verse 11

Romans 11:11 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.

- a. Did they stumble IN ORDER THAT...? Negatively, NOT SO THEY WOULD FALL (as a nation... fall out of God's purposes and plans)
- b. The initial purpose: **salvation for the Gentiles**
 - i) "because of their transgression": note Paul's language... it WAS and IS a transgression, a sin, for Israel to reject Christ
 - ii) "salvation has come to the Gentiles"
- c. Second purpose: **jealousy for the Jews**

- i) Because of salvation coming to the Gentiles
- ii) Israel has become envious or jealous
- iii) PURPOSE: “to” (infinitive of purpose)
 - “I went to the store **to buy** some milk and eggs”
 - “I moved to Durham **to study** at Duke”
 - “I called you on the phone **to invite** you to my house for dinner”

So, here, there is the infinitive of purpose:

salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.

Later: we will see that that envy, that jealousy of the Jews can have a saving purpose:

Romans 11:13-14 I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry ¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.

Bottom line: verse 11 contains PURPOSE UPON PURPOSE

God has a GOOD PURPOSE in the hardening, blindness and transgression of Israel in rejecting Christ as their Messiah, Savior, and King

2. “How Much More” in verse 12

- a. Paul’s use of the “how much more” language in verse 12 is MORE EVIDENCE of God’s amazingly deep and wonderfully good purpose in Israel’s transgression

Romans 11:12 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!

- b. Their transgression means the RICHES of salvation for Gentiles as we shall see
- c. BUT GREATER RICHES will come with Israel’s fullness
- d. In other words, if God can accomplish so much good out of Israel’s hardness and wickedness, think what God will do through Israel’s fullness
- e. What is “Israel’s fullness”? More in a moment
- f. Right now, just see the PURPOSE in all of this

- g. God has written a magnificently complex and deep symphony, with many levels and many instruments and many themes and is in total control of its development

3. Purpose Throughout Romans 11

- a. There are repeated purpose statements in Romans 11

Romans 11:19-20 Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." That is true.

Romans 11:25 Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

Romans 11:30-32 Just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. ³² For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

Purpose after purpose after purpose!!! God has planned all this out for His own glory and the eternal joy of a countless multitude from both Jew and Gentile peoples!

This leads to a deep and difficult concept:

The God who hates all evil and cannot even look upon it yet ordains evil for His own glory and the joy of His chosen people

C. God Ordains Sin for Good Purposes: Two Clear Examples

1. Joseph and His Sinful Brothers

^{ESV} ***Genesis 50:20*** As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

- a. They meant it for evil
 - i) They hated Joseph and wanted deeply to hurt him
 - ii) Their motives were filthy and God could hold them accountable for them
 - iii) Their desires were impure, evil, hurtful
 - iv) "Meant" means "intended, purposed, planned"

b. God meant it for good

- i) God loved Joseph and his family
- ii) God wanted to spare them from the devastating famine
- iii) More than that, God wanted to give a beautiful picture of His sovereign power over sin
- iv) GOD MEANT IT... He intended all the suffering Joseph's brother's did to him
- v) GOD MEANT IT... He intended all the details of Joseph's trials
- vi) GOD MEANT IT... not GOD TURNED IT, GOD USED IT, GOD ADJUSTED IT, GOD ACCEPTED IT
- vii) NO, NO, NO, NO... every bit as much as Joseph's brothers MEANT, God also MEANT... and the same thing was in each of their minds: Joseph's suffering
- viii) BUT God's motives were good
- ix) God can MEAN, INTEND, PLAN sin and evil for good purposes

Some say, **“When life gives you lemons, you need to make lemonade.”** That is based on a truth: we are passive and cannot choose what life gives us. So, we have to make the best of what life gives us. Lemons are sour and impossible to eat. But if you know what to do, you can turn something sour and inedible into something wonderfully sweet.

YES... that's what we try to do. But God doesn't. God didn't turn Joseph's situation for God. No, God MEANT it, just the way it happened.

2. Jesus and His Sinful Countrymen

- a. The clearest example of all: Jesus' crucifixion
- b. The most purely wicked act in history, because Jesus was the only perfectly pure and holy man who ever lived
- c. The motives of all the wicked people involved are filthy
 - i) Judas's motive: greed
 - ii) Annas's motives: revenge and greed
 - iii) Herod's motives: entertainment and politics
 - iv) Pilate's motives: fear and selfish ease

d. For all of these sins, each of the sinners is held **TOTALLY ACCOUNTABLE**

e. **YET** God ordained this death, the death of His only Begotten Son before the foundation of the world for the salvation of souls

Acts 2:23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

Acts 4:27-28 Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.

God's is the loving plan, God's is the good purpose, God's is the eternal glory... BUT theirs is the sin, the wickedness, the responsibility

So also in the case of Israel's national rejection of Christ... it is a sin, it is called a **TRANSGRESSION** twice in this section

BUT God's is the loving plan, God's is the good purpose, God's is the eternal glory

3. Clear conclusion:

The God who hates all evil and cannot even look upon it yet ordains evil for His own glory and the joy of His chosen people

God ordained the hardening of the Jews against Christ to accomplish His good purposes

Now, what were those good purposes?

IV. God's Purpose for Gentiles

A. Salvation Through Israel's Transgression

1. Riches for the Gentiles

Romans 11:12 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!

a. Their transgression means the **RICHES** of God's glory and the gospel for Gentiles all around the world

Romans 9:23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory

This is the riches of the glory of God in their own salvation... the riches of the New Heavens and New Earth; the riches of total forgiveness in God's sight; the riches of a right relationship with God, the riches of a resurrection body and of life eternal

- b. The riches of salvation for every tribe and language and people and nation

Romans 10:12-13 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

- c. The riches of God's display of wisdom in such a marvelous salvation plan

Romans 11:33-34 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

- d. Note the irony: the spiritual poverty and loss of the Jews means immeasurable riches for Gentile believers

2. Reconciliation

Romans 11:15 For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?

- a. Through the rejection of the unbelieving Jews, the world of Gentile believers in Christ has been reconciled to God
- b. Reconciliation means being in a right relationship with God... being at peace with God... and having God at peace with you
- c. Note the irony: Because the Jews are NOT reconciled to God through Christ, the Gentiles ARE reconciled to God through Christ

3. Grafted Into God's People

- a. The third statement of purpose is one of horticulture
- b. The Jews and their heritage from Abraham are pictured as cultivated olive tree
- c. Paul says that unbelieving Jews are like dead, fruitless branches that God strips off the living and growing tree
- d. BUT he says they were rejected, stripped off, evicted SO THAT Gentiles COULD BE grafted in

Romans 11:17-20 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, ¹⁸ do not boast over those branches. If you

do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. ¹⁹ *You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in."* ²⁰ **Granted.**

e. YES, Paul says... IT IS TRUE that the Jews who rejected Christ were broken off from their heritage, in some sense stripped off SO THAT Gentiles COULD BE grafted in

4. Summary: Thus we see the purpose of God in hardening the Jews, in giving them a spiritual stupor, in giving them a spiritual blindness, in giving them a spiritual deafness... verses 7-10 say that is what God did... verses 11-32 explain why

5. The first reason Paul gives is: **SO THAT GENTILES COULD BE SAVED**

B. Deep Question: Why Did Israel Have to Sin for Gentiles to be Saved?

1. God has chosen for His own purposes to go through 2000 years of almost universal Jewish rejection of Christ to achieve almost 2000 years of Gentile salvation through Christ

2. Why the connection?

3. Ultimately, we don't know... but a reasonable explanation is two-fold

1) **No crucifixion: If the Jews had believed in Christ, He would never have been crucified in the first place**

2) **No evangelism: Even if Christ had been crucified, the Jews would never have carried the gospel to the Gentiles**

4. First, no crucifixion:

When Jesus stood before high priest, He stood before the representative of the nation of Israel

Mark 14:61-64 The high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" ⁶² "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." ⁶³ The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. ⁶⁴ "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned him as worthy of death.

Basically, Jesus put this man at the fork in the road... the high priest either had to fall down and worship Jesus or condemn him of blasphemy. If the high priest had fallen down and worshiped Jesus, He would never have been crucified. How then would the Scripture be fulfilled? And how would our sins have been paid for?

a. Isaiah says

Isaiah 53:3-4 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

- b. Jesus' rejection by His own people was the driving force that led to His death
- c. Without it, Pilate would NEVER have crucified Jesus

John 18:33-35 Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" ³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?" ³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me.

5. Secondly, no evangelism

- a. Paul has already told us in so many words that salvation is from the Jews
- b. Theirs are the prophets, theirs is the temple worship, theirs is the whole setting for the message of the gospel, AND theirs is the human ancestry of Christ
- c. Paul has also told us that both Jews and Gentiles alike get saved in the same way, by hearing the message of the Gospel of Christ by messengers sent out who have beautiful feet and who carry the message to the ends of the earth
- d. Thus the only way the Gentiles could be saved is if JEWISH messengers, JEWISH feet carry this JEWISH message to the ends of the earth
- e. BUT the Jews have shown a consistent reluctance to do precisely this... they have wanted to avoid Gentiles altogether or to crush them militarily
- f. There have built up by the time of Christ hundreds of years of hatred and hostility between Jews and Gentiles
- g. It stands to reason at the human level that the Jews would NEVER have taken the gospel message across the next hill to save Gentiles
- h. This is proved out by the behavior of the **early church** even after Christ had commanded them to go to the ends of the earth
- i. They stayed put in Jerusalem and probably would have stayed there forever if the Jewish authorities had not persecuted and scattered them to the four winds

Acts 8:1-4 On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. ³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. ⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

- j. Peter had to be shown a special vision of a large sheet with unclean animals THREE TIMES in order to be convinced to go preach the gospel to a Roman Centurion named Cornelius... and when he entered Cornelius's home, he made it clear he would never have come if God hadn't shown him the vision

Acts 10:28 He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.

- k. AND Jewish Christians opposed Peter when Peter preached to Cornelius

Acts 11:1-3 The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him ³ and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."

The whole purpose of Acts 11, which is almost a word for word repetition of the account of Cornelius's salvation in Acts 10... the whole purpose is to show how Jewish believers accepted the concept of Gentiles coming into the church

- l. The Judaizers among the church were highly suspicious of the Gentile converts and wanted to force them to become Jews... that's what the circumcision controversy was all about!!

The behavior of Jewish Christians in the beginning of Acts shows how unwilling they were even to associate with Gentiles... and apparently it was only when their own people rejected and persecuted them that they began to turn to Gentiles

Summary: God ordained Jewish rejection of Christ because without it, we would never have been saved... we would never have been grafted in

It seems that is true for two reasons: 1) Without Jewish rejection of Christ, He would never have been crucified to begin with; 2) Without Jewish rejection and violent persecution of the early church, the Jewish church would never have preached the gospel to Gentiles

C. Examples from Paul's Ministry

1. Again and again we see Paul preaching first to Jews, then, when they reject, turning to Gentiles
2. The rejection of the Jews was frequently the impetus to great conversions among the Gentiles

Acts 13:44-49 *On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. ⁴⁶ Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For this is what the Lord has commanded us: "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." ⁴⁸ When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. ⁴⁹ The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.*

D. Strange Fulfillment of Israel's Original Purpose

1. Abraham was called from Ur of the Chaldeans for one ultimate purpose: the blessing of all the peoples and tribes and nations on earth

Genesis 12:3 *I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

2. Jacob was told the same thing

Genesis 28:14 *Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.*

3. BUT the Jews had shown no initiative whatsoever toward the Gentiles for the glory of God
4. Jonah is a prime example of Jewish hatred for Gentiles and revulsion that God would ever save them
5. In the end, however, God gets His way... the Gentile elect will be saved through the Jews, but only by a partial hardening of the Jewish nation until the full number of Gentiles comes in
6. God's salvation plan is so deep, so rich, so complex... that is why Paul concluded this chapter this way

Romans 11:33-36 *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Who*

has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

V. God's Purpose for Jews

VI. God's Purpose for His Own Glory

VII. Application

A. Don't Murmur Against God When Trials Come

1. God ordains hard things, even disasters (like Hurricane Katrina) for His own ultimate purposes
2. God's ultimate purposes are always good, but His ways of getting there are impossible to trace out
3. We would never have thought of the double purpose in verse 11: God ordains that Israel's heart would be hard SO THAT Israel would sin in rejecting Christ SO THAT salvation could come to the Gentiles SO THAT Israel would be jealous and in the end saved
4. Remember the example of Joseph: what they MEANT for evil, God MEANT for good... He planned it and executed it without in any way compelling sin SO THAT Joseph's family would be saved from famine AND THAT thousands of years of Bible readers would understand God's sovereignty in all trials and times of suffering
5. Never question the goodness of God or His power or His plan... everything is on schedule and will end in His glory

God willing to prevent evil, but not able?

Then he is not omnipotent.

Is he able, but not willing?

Then he is malevolent.

Is he both able and willing?

Then whence cometh evil?

Is he neither able nor willing?

Then why call him God?

-- Epicurus