

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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Romans 9:6-11:32 (Read 9:6-8) “Why So Many Are Not Saved”

Intro. One thing that troubled the apostle Paul & others is that even among the Jews, relatively few believed in Jesus. Why is it that so many of God’s own people, the Jews, did not believe in Jesus as their Messiah? Should we conclude from their unbelief that Jesus is not really the Messiah? Because of these questions, Paul deals with the problem of Jewish unbelief in Romans 9-11.

Why is it that so many are not true Christians in our day? Probably less than 40% of the American population is in church today, and of that number, probably no more than ½ are born again Christians. Now part of the answer is the fault of the church today. We are not praying for the lost like we should. We are not sharing the gospel often enough in a clear, understandable way. Also, so many non-Christians stumble over the sinful lives of professing Christians. Too often they see a hypocritical people instead of a holy people. But even if we prayed and witnessed and lived the way we should, we would still find that most people would reject Christ and not become Christians. Why is this? We will see from our text today that the real problem is not lack of evidence. It is not due to some fault with God or Jesus. Often times the real problem is the human heart.

In fact, Jesus warned His disciples that they should not expect to find that most people would accept their message. For example, Jesus said, “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Mt. 20:16; 22:14). He also said, “...broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way that leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Mt. 7:13-14). In Luke 13:23 someone asked Jesus, “Lord, are there few who are saved?” He essentially confirmed in the next verse that few will be saved.

Therefore, even if most people do not believe in Jesus, that should have no bearing upon our faith in Jesus. We should not be concerned that we are in a minority of public opinion. When it comes to spiritual matters, the majority is rarely right. If Jesus, His apostles, & early Christians had followed popular public opinion, the Christian faith would have never even started. Remember, God warned long ago, “You shall not follow a multitude in doing evil.” Furthermore, as we see from 10:32-33, God warned that many Israelites would stumble over Christ and not be saved (see Isa. 8:14; 28:16).

So this morning we will deal with the important question, “Why so many are not saved?” I believe I can glean from chapters 9-11 three main reasons why so many are not saved. First of all:

I. BECAUSE OF MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SALVATION

Look over to 10:2-3. There Paul says, “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.” He explains that Jewish rejection of Christ was due to spiritual ignorance. There are two main ways that they misunderstood the way of salvation:

A. Some Think Salvation Comes by Natural Birth - They thought that just because they were Jews, just because they were children of Abraham, that they were children of God. Paul

refutes this misconception beginning in chapter 9, v.7, “nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, ‘In Isaac your seed shall be called.’”¹ Here there is a contrast between Isaac, the child born to Abraham by God’s promise, and Ishmael, the child born to Abraham by the normal physical process. Even though Ishmael was a physical son of Abraham, that did not give him any standing before God. Then Paul said in v.8, “those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God.” Merely being born a Jew does not save anyone. Even so, Jesus said in Jn. 3:6, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Because of that fact, Jesus reaffirmed in the next verse, “You must be born again.” It’s not enough to be born of Jewish flesh. You must also be born of the Spirit. John the Baptist confronted the Jews with the same wrong belief. He stated that God could raise up children to Abraham from the stones. So a physical relationship with Abraham was no reason to assume a spiritual relationship to God.

People make the same mistake today. Just because you have been born to Christian parents does not mean that you are a Christian. Each person must exercise their own faith in Jesus Christ. The reason some people are not saved today is because they have assumed that they are saved just because their parents are.

So let’s clear up that misconception. Who are the true children of God? It is not those who are children by physical birth, but those who are children of promise, as we see in the last of v.8. Isaac was chosen by God, promised by God, and his birth was supernatural. Even so, people become children of God today by believing God’s promise, and experiencing the new birth. Have you placed your faith in Jesus as your Savior? Have you been born again?

Another misconception that many people have is that of:

B. Many Think Salvation Is Obtained by Works – This is a common misconception. In fact, a 2006 Barna survey revealed that 62 percent of Americans believe that a good person can earn eternal salvation. Even so, in our text today we see that some try to be saved by the works of Law. Paul says in vv.31-32, “Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law....” What he is saying is this. The Jews knew that righteousness was required for a right relationship with God. A holy God demands it. They did pursue the law or principle (cf. 7:21, 23; 8:2) of righteousness. But the mistake they made was that they assumed that they could attain their own righteousness by keeping the Law of Moses (v.32). Muslims believe they can attain paradise by obeying the dictates of Islam. But what is the problem with that? It is that God’s standard of righteousness is perfection, and not some human standard.

Likewise, in 10:3 Paul says, “For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness....” Here we see their motivation for seeking salvation by works. They want to take credit for *their own* righteousness. They do not want to go to heaven based on what Christ has done. They want to go to heaven based on what *they* have done. Why is that? It is so they can brag about it. They want to say, “Look what I have done to get to heaven!”

A little boy lay down on the floor with his feet against the wall. He placed a marker at the top of his head. He then “measured” the distance by placing one small foot in front of the other. He excitedly ran to his mother and boastfully said, “I’m eight feet long!”²

¹ This kind of distinction appears earlier in this epistle in connection with the term Jew and circumcision (2:28, 29).

² Wayne Nix, *Pulpit Helps*, 5/2004.

He was using the wrong standard of measurement. God's standard of righteousness is perfect obedience. Who can obey the 10 Commandments, & over 600 other laws of the Old Testament perfectly? You can't obtain salvation that way.

So the Bible teaches that we are not saved by keeping the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. Eph. 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you are saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." Then Paul says in v.4, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." In other words, every believer is done with the law as a way of attaining to righteousness. We have found the true way of righteousness, a righteousness provided for us by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

We have seen that some are not saved because of misconceptions. Our job is to clear up those misconceptions for all who are willing to be persuaded. Another main reason why so many refuse to be saved is:

II. BECAUSE GOD'S SALVATION IS OFFENSIVE TO THE LOST

Look at 9:31-33, "but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone. As it is written: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense....'" They stumbled over Jesus Christ and the way of salvation He provided. When we stumble over something, it is usually because something was in our way that we did not expect. Even so, they did not expect the Messiah to be like Jesus. He did not fit into their preconceived ideas. His way of salvation was not what they expected either. They were sure that obedience to the law was the way of salvation, and they stumbled over any other way. So let's look more in detail at what was offensive to the Jews:

A. Christ Was Offensive Because He Was Spiritual, not Earthly – The Jews were looking for an earthly leader. They were looking for someone who would set them free from political bondage, not the bondage of sin. They were looking for a Messiah who would give them food and abundantly provide for their physical needs. And when Jesus did not fit into their mold, they rejected Him and nailed Him on a cross. And when Christ was crucified, He especially became a stumbling block to them. In fact, Paul said in 1 Cor. 1:23, "but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block...." Crucifixion was a shameful, terrible form of punishment. They wanted to pride themselves in a warrior Messiah, not one who had been crucified.

I believe people make a similar mistake today. They are looking for a Savior who will take care of all their physical & earthly concerns. They are not concerned about sin and righteousness. They are concerned about their health & wealth. When something bad happens to such people physically, they become offended & shake their fist at God saying, "Well I'm not going to believe in you any more if you do not heal my child, or pay my rent." When things don't work out according to their expectations, they get offended with God. You are looking for the wrong kind of Savior.

Not only is Christ offensive to many who are lost, but also:

B. His Way of Salvation Is Offensive – As we have seen, the Jews wanted to earn their way into heaven. But the gospel of the free grace of God is contrary to human pride. You are saved by the work of God, and not your own work. So this is why so many Jews were not saved.

People also do not like the fact that Christ demands repentance of sin as a condition of salvation. Jesus said in Luke 13:3, "unless you repent you will all likewise perish." He also

demanded righteous living & commitment. He said in Mt. 16:24, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."

Ah, but too many preachers and churches are preaching a different Jesus, & lowering the standard to keep from offending people. They are saying you can be a Christian without anything being said about repentance, or giving up your sin. They suggest that you can live by a new ethic of relativism. You can praise it up in church & live the way you want the rest of the week. Listen, our job is not to make God fit into *our* mold, but we are to change to fit into *His* way of salvation! Repentance of sin & forsaking your pride may not be what you want, but it is required to be saved.

When my son David was 4 years old, he was having problems with his asthma. So the Doctor prescribed a nebulizer machine. It uses forced air to produce a mist that contains the medicine. David would have to wear a mask to help him breathe in the medicine. Well, David didn't want any part of it. We said, "David, if you don't take this, you are going to get even sicker." Then David said, "I want to be sick!" Imagine that. At the moment the cure seemed worse than the sickness.

Even so, many people have a spiritual sickness called sin, and yet they don't like the Gospel cure. They would rather be sick. And the answer is not to give them candy in place of the real cure.

So some are not saved because the Gospel message offends them. By the way, are you the type person who is easily offended? You know, that's a miserable way to live. You would have less of a problem getting offended if you would take up your cross, die to self, & follow Jesus. Life is not about you. Life is about Jesus, & bringing glory to Him.

Now let's look at a third main reason why so many are not saved. It is:

III. BECAUSE MANY HAVE BECOME HARDENED TO THE GOSPEL

Why is it that some people will hear the gospel and not be moved a bit by the wonderful story of the death of Christ on the cross? It is because so many have become hardened to the gospel. They have become blinded, as we see in 11:7-8, "What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded. Just as it is written: 'God has given them a spirit of stupor [deep sleep], Eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day.'" God's hardening of Israel in Paul's day is parallel to that in the days of Moses and Isaiah. Then v.10 says, "Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see...." Finally, in v.25 Paul again speaks of the blindness of Israel.

Many Jews lost any sensitivity to the Word of God. They have eyes, but they do not see. They have ears, but they are not longer sensitive to responding to God's Word. You can share the gospel with them, but it is like it goes in one ear and out the other. They become insensitive to the Word of God, because they have heard it over and over again with little or no response.

It is similar to what happens to some people's feet during the summer. At first, they walk barefoot and they are very sensitive to everything that is rough or hot. But if they keep walking barefoot, their feet become hardened and insensitive by the end of the summer.

Do you remember a time when you were moved by the gospel, but now you are not? Have you become hardened to the Word of God? If so, watch out! You could become like the Jews of old, and never become a true Christian!

We read in God's Word that a time will come when God will harden your heart. But He will not harden you until you harden your own heart. So notice:

A. The Preconditions to Hardening – There are 2 things that can contribute to your own hardening:

1. Self-seeking – Before we read of Israel becoming spiritually deaf and blind in chapter 11, vv.8 & 10, we read of them seeking their own way of salvation in v.7. There Paul says, “What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks....” Israel was seeking their own righteousness, but did not find true righteousness. So if you do not seek God’s way of salvation, you will become blinded to it and you will fall for some other way of salvation, which is no salvation at all.

Another way you can contribute to the hardening of your own heart is:

2. Disobedience and Rebellion – In 10:21 we see that the Lord said, “All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people.” Can you picture God like a man stretching out His hands to the Jews, offering salvation, the free forgiveness of sin? But instead of accepted such a wonderful offer, they just turn away and refuse to be saved God’s way, in spite of the miracles Jesus performed, & in spite of what their own Scriptures said. Israel knew better, as Paul affirmed in v.18. For example, 800 years before Christ God said through Isaiah, “Come now, and let us reason together.... Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (1:18). Then later in Isaiah 55:1 God had already revealed that salvation is a free gift. There God says, “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; and you who have no money, Come, buy and eat...without money and without price.” God had revealed salvation by grace through faith, but the Jews just refused to accept God’s way of salvation, and thus became hardened in unbelief.

Are you in danger of developing a heart that is hardened? Don’t let a self-centered & disobedient heart lead you to the point that you become hardened to the Gospel message. Hopefully you will avoid a hardened heart when you understand:

B. The Purpose of Hardening – If you keep hardening your heart against God, then watch out! For God may add to the hardness of your heart. That’s what happened to Pharaoh & the Jews. And God will do so for 2 possible reasons:

1. Judging Purpose – If you keep saying “No” to God often enough, then your eternal fate will not be sealed when you die. Instead, your eternal fate will be sealed even while you are yet alive! Look over at 2 Thess. 2:9-12, “The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

2. God Has a Saving Purpose as Well – God hardened Pharaoh’s heart that He may accomplish a mighty salvation for His people Israel. Even so, God hardened Israel, not only to judge them for their disobedience, but also to bring about salvation to others. First of all:

a) Salvation to the Gentiles – Paul says in 11:11, “I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not!” The negative answer means that the purpose of their stumbling was not that they might fall but was directed to and designed for another end, namely the salvation of the Gentiles. For he goes on to say, “But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.” The Bible seems to teach that if the Jews had believed in Christ in mass, then Jesus would have come again and set up His kingdom before the gospel reached out to the Gentiles. Also, were it not for Jewish rejection, the apostles & other Jewish believers would have been less likely to turn to the Gentiles (see Acts 8:4; 11:19-21). This was certainly true of Paul & his missionary team (see Acts 13:46). But since they did,

millions of Gentiles heard the gospel and were saved! So the Jewish rejection of the gospel contributed to many Gentiles being saved.

But the hardening of national Israel is only temporary. Their day is coming when God will accomplish the:

b) Salvation to the Jews – The thesis in the verses which follow is that the rejection of Christ by the Jews, & the setting aside of the Jewish nation by God (cf. Matt. 21:43), is not final. The time will come when the Jews will become jealous of the Gentiles turning to their God in such numbers. The day will come when they will reflect upon the favor and blessing of God bestowed upon the Gentiles and thereby be induced to turn to the Lord. Paul said in vv.13-15, “For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them. For if their being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” The more success his ministry has with the Gentiles, the more Israel’s salvation is promoted by their being moved to jealousy.

Then in vv.25-26 we see that the day is coming when many Jews will turn to Christ in the last days. There Paul says, “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.’” The partial hardening of Israel will have a terminus. Once God’s plan for reaching a full number of Gentiles from all nations has been realized, then God will bring about the conditions that will lead to an amazingly large & full number of Jews (cf. v.12) to be saved in the end times. I believe that one thing that could contribute to Jewish salvation in the last days is the way Christians will befriend them against their many enemies. I believe that it is quite possible that *our* generation will be the one to see many Jews believing in Christ.

Conclusion: I want to ask you to reflect upon your response to the message today. Are you sure you are saved? If you were to die today & God were to ask you, “Why should I let you into heaven?” what would you say? Would your answer reveal that you have had a misconception about salvation? Would you say, “I was born into a Christian home,” or “I am a good person” or “I go to church”? Is there anything about the true Gospel message that offends you? Are you in danger of having a hardened, unresponsive heart? If you have not yet placed your faith in Christ as the way of salvation, trust in Christ today. Children & young people, the longer you delay trusting in Christ as Savior, the more hardened you become to the gospel message. Don’t gamble with your eternal soul.

Sources: John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).