

*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.”*

<sup>19</sup> *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.”*

<sup>20</sup> *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.”*

<sup>21</sup> *But concerning Israel he says,*

*“All day long I have held out my hands  
to a disobedient and obstinate people.”*

**11** *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.<sup>2</sup> 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:<sup>3</sup> “Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me”?<sup>4</sup> And what was God’s answer to him? “I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”<sup>5</sup> So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.<sup>6</sup> And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. (Romans 10:18-11:6)*

### God Loved Israel

One of the unique things about being a pastor is that I get to spend time with people during difficult moments in their lives. I can’t count the number of hours I’ve spent in hospitals and in funeral homes and in living rooms talking with people who are sick or worried or grieving. Those people often talk about the person they’ve lost or that they’re worried about and quite often, they tell stories that illustrate that person’s love. Just a couple of days ago, someone told me the story of her father catching her and her sister playing with matches and rather than blowing up, with tears in his eyes, he begged them not to do that again. Another time, a woman told me how her father used to make his children shovel the driveway. And she would get so mad because there was a snow blower sitting right there. But as she looked back, she realized he was teaching them about the value of hard work. Those stories illustrate how unpredictable love can be. It does the unexpected and at times, even the unexplainable. And we have an example of that in the word of God before us this morning. St. Paul quotes a whole series of Old Testament passages to show that God really did love the people of Israel. And because he’s talking about them and not us, it may seem like there is very little here to say to us. But the love God had for them is exactly the love he has for us. So, see the value in knowing that **God loved Israel.**

#### I.

**He gave them the gospel.** Right before our text Paul said, **“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”** The only way anyone ever becomes a believer is by hearing the good news about Jesus. So Paul asks: **“Did they not hear?”** And the “they” is Israel. To answer that question, he starts quoting from the Old Testament scriptures. It’s obvious from the way he attacks the problem that Paul is not limiting himself to the Jews of his day. There really is no difference between Jews who lived during the Old Testament and those who lived during the life of Christ and those who live today. There is only one way to heaven: through faith in Christ. And the only way to get that faith is by hearing the gospel.

The Jews in every age have heard that message. Paul quotes from Psalm 19: **“Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”** But he’s not talking about the voice of gospel preachers. In Psalm 19, King David says, **“The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the works of his hands.”** He’s not talking about pastors or missionaries carrying the good news to the ends of the world, but rather about the truth that all people on earth should know that God is real and that they have to answer to him because God is the maker of all things. We sometimes call that “the natural knowledge of God.” It is the way God prepares people to believe. Luther once said that you would have to preach to a donkey for a very long time to convert him, because he has no knowledge that God exists or that we have to answer to him. But God built that knowledge into us.

But that’s only the beginning. God said through Moses: **“I will make you [again meaning Israel] envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.”** Those who are not a nation, those who have no understanding – that’s us, the gentiles. God was going to use us to make Israel jealous. When God turned to us because Israel wouldn’t come back to him, they would long to have back their old relationship with him. Just to make the point clear, God said through Isaiah, **“I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.”** Again, that’s us. Our ancestors were all pagans. In Paul’s day, the only gentile Christians were ones that he and his fellow workers had carried the gospel to. None of those people were expecting him to show up. They weren’t looking for new gods and new beliefs. But God sent the gospel to them and claimed them.

Part of the reason he did that was for Israel. He wanted them back. Paul quotes God speaking through Isaiah one more time, **“All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.”** Once in a nursing home, I saw a very elderly man sitting in a wheelchair. A little boy, maybe three years old, came running toward him. That old man held out his arms to pick that child up. But the boy ran past him to his mother who standing behind the old man. They were somebody else’s family. Seeing that old man hold out his arms only to be disappointed, saddened me. God has held out his arms to Israel for thousands of years. From the time when Israel came up out of Egypt until the time of Christ was 1500 years. And another 2000 years have gone by since then and God has been holding out his arms to Israel for all that time, calling them to see Jesus as their promised Savior, calling them to trust in his love and forgiveness and revel in all that he wants to do for them. But what has been the result? The Old Testament is a long and sad story of God’s love and his people’s rejection and that story only continues in the New Testament.

But God loved Israel. And he never completely gave up on them, not even when he turned to us. God has the same love for us. God planned from eternity to make us his. He called us by name before the world began. He worked all things so that at just the right moment, the gospel came to us and we believed. God has been holding out his arms in love to us all our lives long.

Are we disobedient and obstinate? If you would’ve asked most Old Testament Jews if they were unfaithful to God, my guess is that they would’ve said “no.” They would’ve pointed to the temple in Jerusalem and the sacrifices and the dietary laws and said, “See? We’re committed to God.” If you would’ve pointed to the idol worship that was going on side by side with those sacrifices, if you would’ve pointed out all the commands they ignored and all the ways they disregarded what God said and followed the ideas of the nations around them, they would have made some excuse. They would have defended themselves and justified themselves and finally turned it all back on you, because they wouldn’t want to hear what it really means to be faithful to God.

Are we any different? Jesus said that in the last times the love of most would grow cold. Don’t we see that happening all around us? I read an article this week which argued that the time is past when we can allow people to claim that being against homosexuality is a matter of conscience. If you’re against homosexuality, you’re just not American. Many churches that call themselves Christian would echo that sentiment. Most Christian churches today feel that talking about sin and grace just drives people away. They want to find some different message, some different way to connect with people today. They don’t want to be bound by what God said in the past. I have found that attitude in every congregation I have served. Every time I have to address the fact that we don’t participate in scouting, I’m accused of being a hateful. Every time I have to address living together and sex outside of marriage, I get pushed away. The list could go on and on.

The issues are different. But the attitude that Israel showed is very much alive in the Christian Church today. Rather than letting God’s word take captive our every thought, we sinners want God to compromise with

us. We want him to let us slide. We want to recast his message so that it doesn't challenge or offend people today – in fact, we want God to give in to what our society thinks. What we really want is to put something else in God's place in our hearts. The sinful nature always worships itself and its desires. If we allow that sinful nature free reign in our hearts, it will destroy our faith.

But the amazing thing about God is that he doesn't just let that happen. Like he did for Israel, he holds out his arms to us, day after day and year after year. No matter how guilty we've been, no matter how much we've embraced our society's thinking, no matter how often we've put what we want ahead of what God says, he keeps calling us back to him.

## II.

God sent his Son to die and pay for all the sins of the world. That includes the sins Israel committed and the sins we commit. That includes the sinful desires of our hearts that just don't want to listen to God. That includes everything that has ever pulled us away from him. Jesus died and then rose and God has wiped those sins away. In the good news about Christ, God holds out his arms to us and through that good news, he pulls us into his embrace. **God loved Israel. He preserved a believing remnant from them.**

In view of centuries of disobedience, Paul asks, **“Did God reject his people?”** The answer is no. Paul was Jewish. He believed. Paul points back to Elijah. During his day, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel tried to exterminate the true faith and most of the northern kingdom of Israel plunged into Baal worship. Elijah fled to the desert and he prayed to die because there was no one left in Israel that believed. But God told him that he had reserved 7000 people in Israel who were faithful.

Think about that: 7000 out of a population of maybe two million people. That's less than one half of one percent. Yet, God says that proves that he still loved his people. How can that be? Paul says, **“So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace.”** Do you know what a remnant is? It's what is leftover when you're done cutting. If you buy carpet remnants, you buying pieces that are left after the company cuts a big section off a roll to install someplace. It's too small for them to do anything with, but maybe you can use that piece for your deck or a section of your basement. My grandmother used to take remnants from sewing projects and make them into quilts. If she didn't use them, they were worthless. She used to have bags of scrap cloth waiting for some future quilt.

For generations, God held out his hands to a disobedient and obstinate people. Most of them couldn't be bothered to come. Only the scraps believed. Only the leftovers let God sweep them up in his embrace. And what made them different? They were just as sinful as anybody else. But by grace, God chose them. By grace, God came to them in his gospel and gave them faith. By grace, God kept that faith alive, when everyone else in their society thought they were crazy.

And by grace in our age, when the message of every media outlet is contrary to the Word of God, when even churches called Christian and Lutheran can't be bothered with what the Bible says, by grace God is still preserving a remnant. By grace that message that Jesus died to pay for the hardness of our hearts still makes a difference. By grace given to us in that message, the Holy Spirit reaches into our hearts and makes us his and he preserves a remnant of believers in a country that is growing more and more godless by the minute. There are a little over 300,000,000 people in this country today. One half of one percent would be one and half million. We members of the WELS are less than a third of that, although we are not the only Christians in this country by any means. But even though most people still claim to belong to a Christian church, “no preference” is the fastest growing religious option today. The love of most is growing cold. But God's love is still real. God's promises will still come true. God's power still works in the gospel. He will preserve a remnant of believers by his grace until Jesus returns.

The gospel is a love story. But like those stories that I've heard in hospitals and funeral homes and living rooms, God's love often does the unexpected. Why did his Son die for us? For no other reason than to save us. When Israel walked away from God, he didn't walk away from them. To this day, he is still holding out his hands to them in the gospel. Some Jews do still believe. In this age of unbelief and ignorance and lack of interest in what God really says, he still proclaims his gospel. That power still changes hearts. Although we are no more than scraps, that power has changed us. We didn't deserve it and we can't explain it. But by grace, God chose us. By grace, God gave us faith. By grace, God will bring us home to heaven. Rejoice in that grace. Amen.