

Did God's Plan A Fail?

Week 4 - Romans 11:11-24

Objectives:

- Understand that we, as 'Gentiles,' are no better or more deserving than Israel
- To gain a greater appreciation for the sobering reality of salvation by grace alone
- See that Jesus is the common root for all who are saved

? Have you ever gardened or been on a farm? What have you grown, cultivated, or harvested?

What stands out?

Romans 11:11-24 (NIV)

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. ¹² But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring!

¹³ I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry ¹⁴ in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? ¹⁶ If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches.

¹⁷ 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 consider yourself to be superior to those other 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. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. 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. ²³ And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. ²⁴ After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

? What is Paul referring to by using the word “riches” in v15-16? Why does he use this word?

Possible answers: salvation, the word riches conveys the significance and weight of salvation

? Paul uses a metaphor of the root, the cut off branches, and the grafted in branches. Who represents each part of the metaphor?

Possible answers: Christ as “root”; Israel as the branches that were cut off (though some remain); Gentiles represent the branches grafted in.

? Together, identify and re-read some of the if-then statements in this passage. Is there anything more that you observe about what Paul is saying?

Possible answers: v12 if transgression means riches, inclusion means more; v15 if rejection brings reconciliation, acceptance means life; v16 if the dough is holy, so is the batch; v16 if the root is holy, so are the branches; v21 if God did not spare natural branches, he will not spare you; v23 if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in; v24....

Grafting is a technique that joins two plants into one. In general, a wound is created on one of the plants, and the other is inserted into that wound so each plant's tissues can grow together. The wound needs to be protected until it heals to avoid pests and diseases entering the graft. This is often done with trees and shrubs to combine the best characteristics of the two plants.
<https://www.thespruce.com/what-does-grafting-mean-4125565>

“Most varieties of olive trees are self-fertile, meaning that you can get fruit by having just one tree. Pollen from the anthers (the male part of the plant) is transferred to the stigma (the female part of the plant) of the same tree. However, there are some varieties of olive trees that are not self-fertile. Those varieties need another tree or sometimes more than one tree for pollination, not of the same variety. The olive tree pollen is transferred primarily by wind. Research findings recommend that growers plant at least three olive varieties in close proximity in their farms to **promote some cross-pollination, which has been found to increase yield by at least 10%.**” <https://wikifarmer.com/olive-tree-propagation-and-pollination/>

Digging a little deeper

Read aloud: this passage may take a few re-reads and clarifying together what Paul is saying. It is good to take time as needed to chew on the passage rather than feeling like every question here needs to be answered. Nevertheless, we will go through some interpretive questions.

? What do you think Paul intends to say by using the word “envious” in reference to salvation of the Gentiles?

Possible answers: to recognize their sin and desire salvation; to be reminded of the goodness of God and their need for salvation; to recognize the futility of their works and instead trust in Jesus; even literal jealousy/envy of others in their salvation

? What attitude towards those who are not saved does Paul encourage us to take in vs 20-21?

Possible answers: humility not superiority, salvation is by grace through faith...

? What do you think Paul's main point is?

Possible answers: Israel still may have hope of salvation, Gentiles have no reason to lord their own over them, and that all depend on God for grace.

Leader note for verse 22:

In verse 22, it may seem like Paul is threatening that the Gentiles' salvation is constantly at risk. If the question comes up, try to stay in the text of what Paul writes. Though we should remain sober, his challenge is about "persisting in unbelief", rather than sinning. That is, denying Christ as Lord! You might go back to some previous passages, too, to remind your group of the salvation that Christ was won for our sake, which is constantly upheld by Him. 6:11-14, 7:20-8:2, 8:12-13, 9:16

Bringing it home

John 15:5-8 (NIV)

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

? What does this passage say about our role in salvation?

Possible answers: salvation depends on being grafted into (something we don't do) and remaining in the vine (Christ)

? What does this passage say about bearing fruit?

Possible answers: only by remaining in Christ can we bear fruit as His disciples, bearing fruit brings the Father glory and is a sign (not the source) of our salvation

? What motivates you to ever think that God loves someone less than you, or that you are a better 'branch'?

Possible answers: it is tempting to view our worth as a function of our gifts, talents, and abilities; Pride; insecurity in God's love or our own salvation; a result of believing we need to 'earn' God's love and acceptance rather than trusting in Christ's finished work

For Discussion and Accountability

? Share what sinful thoughts this passage may convict you of: pride and contempt towards others, fear of God's wrath despite Christ's work, shame for your lack of fruit, or perhaps something else?

? Do you pray for those in your life who remain 'ungrafted'? Share about someone who comes to mind & take time to pray for them.