

Immeasurable Grace
Sermon August 16, 2020

Scripture reading: 1 Kings 19:10-18 & Romans 11:1-10

Dear beloved,

Last month, based on Romans 8:38-39, we learned that nothing can separate us for God's steadfast love, which was proclaimed by Jesus Christ. This is a deep and secured theological statement, and shows how much God loves you and me.

As I repeat this statement, I will add another very important fact to this: Nothing can separate you from God's love, but you can separate yourself from God.

It is still a mystery for me and many theologians, if God's calling, God's redemption, can be ended or not. Will God give up on me if I separate myself from Him? Since we are humans and often make mistakes, will God say to me, or to you, that He had enough of us?

The same question was raised by Paul when he asks: "*Did God reject his people?*" Romans 11:1 Did God reject the Israelites, after they rejected Jesus Christ, the son of God?

In Exodus 32, there is a very significant story around this topic. God's people, the Israelites, were rescued from Egypt and now were wandering in the desert towards the promised land. Moses was called up to the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments to share with God's people. When Moses was away, Aaron influenced the people to create for themselves a figure of a Golden Cow, whom they can worship as God, as they learned in Egypt. This caused a lot of pain, humiliation, and frustration to God, as we read:

"Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' "I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

But Moses sought the favour of the Lord his God. "Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, to whom you swore by yourself: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened".

Exodus 32: 7-14

This story shows us that God was so deeply hurt by His people's sinful actions that He was thinking to destroy the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to create a new population from Moses' roots. Moses' prayer changed God's heart and God's decision.

In our scripture reading, we heard that there was a time, when amongst millions of Israelites, only 7,000 remained faithful to God. The rest turned away from the Lord. The people separated themselves from God.

From Jewish history we know that, in 588 BC, God punished His unfaithful people with the Babylonian exile when His people were forced to leave their homeland and were relocated to Babylon for 70 years.

We often see how sin, our selfish desire, our actions, and our hardened hearts can change a person. We often can witness wise and smart people who climb the ladder of success and how they are flourishing. But suddenly, for some reason, they lose their control, they mess up with bad people, and their whole lives crash down. We are wondering, what happened?

Our hearts are aching for how often God's chosen people, the Israelites, did reject the Saviour Jesus Christ, who was sent to them, who was one of them, who was prophesied and called the root of David.

In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God. John 1:4-5, 9-12

Our Lord Jesus Christ was rejected by His people again and again from His birth until He descended into heaven.

Once Jesus was sitting with His disciples around the marvelous church of Jerusalem. As the disciples were magnifying the building, Jesus interrupted them: *"Do you see all these things?" He asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."* Matthew 24:2

Because God's people turned their back again to their Creator and sustainer, and did not obey the gospel, 40 years later, in 70 AD, the temple and the whole country of Israel was destroyed by Romans, and the people of Israel spread all around the world.

The gospel preached by the apostles was often rejected by Israelites and, for this, Paul decided to preach to gentiles. This is why Paul was challenged by the question: *"Did God reject his people?"*

His answer is: *“By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people.”* Romans 11:1-2

About 35 years ago, I heard a very significant and powerful sentence from one of my professors, and I pray that the Holy Spirit may write this sentence deep in your heart now. “Jesus Christ was not able to CHANGE the world, but He SAVED the world”. Instead of rejecting you and me, He SAVED you and me.

Paul points his finger on him when he says: look at me. I was fighting against Christ’s church, I killed those who followed Jesus; I planned to arrest and torture those who called themselves Christians. But the grace of God saved me, then changed me.

God turned His rejection into our reconciliation when He accepted Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, which was presented by Christ on our behalf. Now, let us take this message of immeasurable grace very personally. God elected you and me to be His children by His grace. We are saved by Christ by His grace. We did not deserve this gift of grace, but Our Father decided to include us in His heart. In Romans 11:29, Paul says that *“God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.”*

Dear beloved, we learned from history, that God is merciful. Let us take strength in the fact of God’s covenant faithfulness, and His mercy.

- *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”* Ephesians 2:8
- *“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”* John 1:12

Romans 9, 10, and 11 are teaching us that God can change rejection into rejoicing or reconciliation by His righteousness. The human proof is Paul, himself: who he was and who he became, by God’s grace.

You play a vital part in God’s plans. Please continue to obey God. Love Him with all your heart, mind, spirit, and your whole being. Rejoice that you are saved, but do NOT take this for granted. Do not think, that from now you can do all kinds of evil, just because you are saved. Be thankful for what you received and you daily receive from God. Do not forget all His benefits. Do not turn your back to Him. Love Him and serve Him as His child. Take it seriously that nothing can separate you from His love, but YOU can separate yourself from Him.

Jesus Christ died for the whole world, and some people would like to say that, for this, the whole world goes to heaven. That is not true. The Bible says that at the end of our lives we still have to stand in front of the judgment seat, and God will decide if we will be condemned or saved. I cannot say that all people will be saved. Hell is a busy place, too.

Remember that your place is reserved in heaven. Hold tight to Christ and keep going, as God's child and Jesus' friend, to bloom and blossom. We are not saved by our own actions but by the grace of God; we have to show the fruits of our thankful life. Amen