



## **"Necessary Jealousy"<sup>1</sup>**

### **Romans 11:11-15**

I have had many occasions where I've been awestruck by the night sky. I remember once being about 6,000 feet high on Mt. Rainier in Washington State. The sky was pristine. No clouds. The moon was full. But I don't have to be on a mountain in order to appreciate space. I could be sitting outside and staring up. It's fascinating when you see all the stars and even some planets out there.

Have you ever had this experience? Have you ever felt almost enveloped in the moment? Space is fascinating. And, for many of us, we've probably also looked at pictures in space or from space and we've said, "Wow!" You look at a picture of earth or a picture of Jupiter. Or, maybe you've seen the video on YouTube that compares the size of the planets with our sun, and then our sun with other stars. The right response to all of this vastness is "Wow!" And, for many of us, we love this. So, we keep looking at NASA pictures or watching videos at times to show us how huge the galaxy is, how small we are – and how awesome God is!

I mean, as I look at the creation in the galaxies, I see how vast and powerful God is, don't you? But here's something interesting to me. For most, if not all, people, I have never heard anyone say, "Oh, the universe is so complex, so I never look up at night." They don't look up in the sky and say, "Ahhh! Is that a meteor or a meteoroid?!" "I think that's a star, but could it be a planet? Which one twinkles? Oh wait, 'twinkle, twinkle, little star!'" I've never heard someone say, "math and measurements are so huge in outer space that I just don't want to hear it!" Even though the numbers are astronomical, we still are in awe. And the reason why we're in awe is because our mind is blown!

That all intrigues me because with the galaxies, we say "Wow," but with God, many people often say, "I give up because it's too complex." In Romans 1:16, the apostle Paul wrote, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."<sup>2</sup> Did you know that the phrase "power of God" is only ever used in Scripture to refer to the gospel and to Jesus Christ himself? I mean, it's certainly true that God's power is revealed in creation, but there's something the Scriptures are telling us when God reserves that phrase for Jesus and his work. I want to read to you a section from a book called *The Gospel Primer* written by Milton Vincent. In that, he writes, "Indeed, God's power is seen in erupting volcanoes, in the unimaginably hot boil of our massive sun, and in the lightning speed of a recently discovered star seen streaking through the heavens at 1.5 million miles per hour. Yet in the Scripture such wonders are never labeled '*the power of God.*' How powerful, then, must the gospel be that it would merit such a title!"

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<sup>1</sup> This manuscript is still in the rough draft phrase. I recommend you utilize these notes in conjunction to the sermon to gain greater insight and clarity.

<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 1:16.

Sadly, I think many people think they're failing spiritually if the Bible seems to blow their minds. They think they need to comprehend everything on first reading. Or, they need to have it all figured out right now. No! I mean, there are basic realities that we ought to understand and build upon (like with space, I know there's space. I know there are planets and stars), but there are many things I don't understand and that's what draws me in.

This is similar to Romans chapter 11. Last week, when preaching the message, I thought to myself, "What's the application for us in learning this chapter. In some ways, it feels kind of off from the rest of the book." But then I thought about Paul's conclusion of this chapter and realized that the application is "Wow!" Paul comments on the richness of God's salvation of Jews and Gentiles and that leads him to praise. Now, if that conclusion bores you, then I hope you're consistent with this. I hope you don't look at the stars or go out in nature and say "Wow!" None of us would do that, though, because we know that to be in awe is an appropriate response. And, in the gospel, we are led to be more fully in awe of God himself! So, I hope you're ready and hopeful to be in awe of God today. And, if we cover things that your mind is having a hard time grasping, don't let that frustrate you. Instead, let that cause you to be more amazed with God himself.

With that, let's pray and then read from Romans 11:11-15. [Pray for the MacPhaill-Faussey's. Pray for New Life & Mart Novak. Pray for Phyllis Hughey.]

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*<sup>11</sup> So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. <sup>12</sup> Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! <sup>13</sup> Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry <sup>14</sup> in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. <sup>15</sup> For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?<sup>3</sup>*

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Verse 10 ends with a quote from the Old Testament proclaiming a curse on Israel. Paul is saying may they bend their backs forever. And then, in verse 11, Paul then asks another question that would be on the mind of the readers: So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? The words "stumble" and "fall" have a different meaning here. To stumble means that you can get back up again. To fall refers to falling completely with no hope of getting up. So, Paul is saying, "Did God plan for the Jews to fall because he wanted them destroyed?" Does he want them to fall for falling's sake or is there a more grand design? Paul reveals there is a more grand design – a gloriously grand design. He answers his question with the phrase "By no means" again! So, may it never be. God wouldn't work this way. It's impossible. Yes, verse 10 says that they will bend their backs forever, but we have to recognize that the term "forever" clearly refers to some within national Israel who reject the Lord Jesus. This phrase "forever" doesn't have to refer to all of those who are a part of physical Israel because Paul already said that within physical Israel there are the elect and then those who are hardened.

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:11–15.

The fact that there's a remnant in Israel means that there's a preserving of physical Israel. And, in the preserving of physical Israel, God is calling a remnant to himself, leading to what I believe to be a fuller inclusion of those within the people of Israel. But, I'm getting ahead of myself.

In this text, we get to peer a little into seeing the power of God at work in saving people from the Jews and the Gentiles. What we see here is God's continued commitment to the Jewish people – even in his rejection of them. Because in his rejection of them, he's making some jealous. And, that jealousy will lead to not only the full number of Jews coming to salvation, but will lead to the resurrection.

Now, if you say, "Why does this matter?" First, it should lead to awe for you! But second, I think these words are confronting a local church that had Jews in it. Paul is telling the Gentiles that the Jews still matter in God's plan, and they should care about this! In addition, in our own day, I loved what one commentator named Tim Keller wrote: "**Are we creating a community that is the fulfillment of what God had called Old Testament Israel to be? Would a devout Jew look at our church and be aroused to envy, and give the gospel a hearing**" (Keller, p. 91)? In our time period, as Gentiles, we shouldn't negate the Jews. Instead, we should realize their placement in God's plan. We should even see their rejection as God's commitment to them, and to us! And, so today, while we talk about this necessary jealousy of the Jews, we will focus on God's commitment to the salvation of Jews and non-Jews (i.e. – Gentiles). And, in these verses, we're going to see how Paul again proves that God has not thrown the Jews to the curb, but he still has plans for them – which coincides for our eternal welfare! I think the big idea of these verses is that **God's commitment to the Jews (and their jealousy) means glorious salvation for all**. But in saying this statement, Paul's going to show the beautiful complexity of this gospel power of God in saving the world! So, let's first look at verse 11. In this verse we see:

### 1. God's commitment involves rejection (v. 11).

Read verse 11 again with me: <sup>11</sup>So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. <sup>4</sup>

Through Israel's trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles. Wait. What?! Some theologians take ideas from this and say something like, "Israel was supposed to be perfect, but because they didn't, God instituted plan B and brought Jesus and then salvation to the Gentiles. So, too bad, Jews! You missed your opportunity."

This couldn't be the interpretation because Paul has said over and over again in the book of Romans that salvation has always been by grace. The Jewish people, on a whole, missed that. They *transgressed*, as Paul says. The term "transgress" simply means that they've gone off-track. They sought righteousness by works instead of by God's grace. Meaning, they thought they could attain to what God wanted. And God's standard is perfection. But, the only one who can save us is God – not us!

So, God, in his perfect wisdom, sent Jesus at the right time in this world to fulfill the Law and to grant salvation to *anyone* who knows their sinfulness, their neediness for God to forgive them and reconcile them to himself through Jesus alone. And Paul has showed us in Romans, that many Gentiles have accepted this message. But the Jews reject it.

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<sup>4</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:11.

By the way, this isn't just Paul's theology – this is what Paul's showed us from the Old Testament. And, I also think about when we studied the book of Matthew. Matthew emphasizes the Gentiles being saved when he wrote about the wise men coming to worship Jesus and the city of Jerusalem rejecting Jesus. Here are men who were probably cursed astrologers – and yet God draws them from their idolatry and they worship Jesus. But the city that was supposed to be God's chosen city, rejected Jesus! It's a strange reversal, but for those of us who are like the magi, we bow down in praise!

Now, through the Gentiles receiving salvation, Paul does reveal that God is committed to the Jews – although he simply alludes to it here in verse 11. What we see here is that God's intent is to make the Jews jealous. What does that mean? In our culture, jealousy essentially *always* has a negative connotation. I remember once when I heard Oprah say that she denied one of the descriptions of God in the Old Testament, which was that he is a jealous God. She didn't like that term and couldn't believe a jealous God.

But jealousy doesn't always have to be bad. Jealousy refers to a desire *for* something. And, it's an intense desire for something. So, this desire can be very bad because oftentimes, we intensely desire things that are sinful. But when God was jealous for Israel, he was jealous *for* them – for their good and God's glory. The implication is that the Jews have been jealous for sinful things, but God, through drawing the Gentiles to a reconciled relationship with him, is causing Jews to be jealous for the right things. So, even in saving the world, he's committed to the Jewish people's good. One man named John Stott wrote, “. . .if the something desired is in itself good, a blessing from God, which he means all his people to enjoy, then to 'covet' it and to 'envy' those who have it is not at all unworthy. This kind of desire is right in itself, and to arouse it can be a realistic motive in ministry” (as quot. in Keller, p. 90).

We do this in our teaching of other people, don't we? In the classrooms, teachers incorporate positive reinforcement. Why? It's not only for the child who did the work, but to also provoke to jealousy the child who is disobeying. Don't they *want* these things, too?

If we think about this book of Romans, the way Paul has written seems to have provoked the Jewish Christians to jealousy. They've read about the salvation God has given to the whole world – including Gentiles, and then the Jews within the church seem to essentially be asking, “What about us?!” This is also Paul's way of ministry as revealed in Acts. He goes to the Jews first. Many Jews reject. Some Jews receive. Then Paul goes to the Gentiles, and the Jews become increasingly angered. But Paul says here, there's another step. The Gentile salvation should continue to lead Jews to a desire that they'd receive salvation. So, think about the story in Acts 6 when the early church sets apart people to care for the needy. We discover that many Jewish priests then came to Jesus. Why? Well, what the church was doing was actually the priests job to do. They were to take resources and care for the poor, and they weren't doing it. But the Christian community was caring for the needy in their midst. So, the priests were convicted, made jealous and they received the gospel!

## 2. God's commitment means glorious salvation for all (v. 12).

<sup>12</sup> Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:12.

Paul talks about riches for the world and then moves to talk about the Jewish people's full inclusion. Again, let me state that interpreting Romans 11 can be quite difficult. There are many differing viewpoints within biblical Christianity. But I'm going to take a stance that I believe aligns most closely with the Scripture – and I hope that it encourages and strengthens you as we ponder.

Paul states something and then simply restates it. Why does he do this? Well, repetition aids learning, and also, in repeating, he's emphasizing a certain point. So, he uses the words "trespass" and "failure" to describe the Jewish people. "Trespass" gives a little different nuance than transgress. To trespass is to go into territory that you weren't meant to go in. They entered into idolatry against God. They've worshipped other things – including themselves – instead of worshipping the Lord.

Now, before you say, "Oh yeah, those Jews. They should get their act together," let me remind you of yourself! Paul tells us Gentiles in Ephesians 2 that we were born children of wrath like the rest of mankind. In Romans 3, we're told that there is nothing within us to cause God to love us. We suppressed the truth about God and embraced other things as more worthy of our affection and service. So, we too have served the things around us more than loving God. So, the Jews did, too. They went into territory they shouldn't have entered. Therefore, they've failed. When God told them, "Do this and you will live," they said they'd do it. But, of course, they should have known they couldn't obey God as they ought to. No human can obey God as they ought to. We, from birth, fail.

But Paul says that even this failure is a part of God's plan. As a result of their failure, riches have come to the world. And, Paul then specifies what he means by the world. Riches have come to the Gentiles. What are the riches he's talking about here? Is he saying that if you trust Jesus, you'll get a lot of money and land? No. Oftentimes, when Paul speaks of God's riches, he is talking about God's mercy and grace. In Romans 2:4, he talks about the Jews presuming on the riches of God's kindness, forbearance and patience. I think these ideas can be included in what Paul's saying here, but in the broader context of this passage, Paul is speaking of the Gentiles being reconciled to God.

To be reconciled with God is riches! Recently, I saw an article talking about how Jeff Bezos, the wealthiest man in the world is settling at his divorce – giving his wife 37 billion dollars. In this world, riches can come even at divorce! But the reason why the riches even come then is because she was his wife. Think about this with God – when you come to faith in Jesus, you receive all the riches that God has to offer in himself! And God offers *all* riches in himself because he's God!

But I want to be careful with this statement because some people might simply think, "Oh, if I believe God, he's going to give me a big house, gold streets, a crystal sea, and so much more in Heaven." And, all you're doing is taking your sinful lusts and saying that the best thing God has to offer is his stuff. That's a horrible assumption. God *is* riches in himself! Every blessing flows from him because He is. So, when we read that through the Jews rejection, riches have come to the Gentiles, we're seeing that God is giving himself to the Gentiles – to be with them always. By the way, this seems affirmed in verse 15, when Paul says "if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world. . . ." Reconciliation of the Gentile world with who? Being reconciled with God.

This is what humanity was made for. The separation that Adam and Eve experienced because of their sin was conquered in Jesus when he took the punishment and separation for sins on the cross in the place of sinners. And, in God's sovereign plan, the gospel went out from the Jews to the Gentile world. And many Gentiles throughout the ages have seen the beauty of trusting Jesus. Ventura, we should pause for a moment and thank God that we live in the time period we live in. If we lived in North America 3,000

years ago, as far as we know, we wouldn't have heard of the One True God. But we live in this time period. We are worshipping Jesus. We are saved and secure! And while there's sorrow that the Jews have rejected, we can also rejoice that God didn't say, "Well, if the Jews reject, I'm rejecting everyone." No. Instead, we learn that this was God's plan all along. He designed to save the world! So, in order to save the world, he rejected the Jews for a time and has come to the Gentiles.

But then Paul adds an interesting line at the end of verse 12: if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!<sup>6</sup> The term "full inclusion" means "full number." When Paul makes this statement, he's saying that God isn't done with the Jews. The rejection of physical Jews didn't mean a total rejection. There is an elect within the Jews that he plans to save. And, now Paul says that this isn't just a little detail in God's plan, but that this is an important detail worth noting! Paul argues from lesser to greater here. If God's rejection of the Jews leads to Gentiles having the riches of reconciliation with God, then what will happen when the full number of Jews enters?

Right here, I think we should scratch our heads and say, "You're exciting me Paul, but I don't know what you're talking about!" All I know is that Paul is indicating that the salvation of Jews should matter to every Gentile because Paul is indicating that their salvation will lead to even greater blessings for us! And that's where I'm going to stop at this point because Paul just lets this hang for a couple verses, and then in verses 13-14 he shows us how

### **3. God's commitment affects Paul's commitment (and should affect ours; vv. 13-14).**

Read verses 13-14 again with me: <sup>13</sup> Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry <sup>14</sup> in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.<sup>7</sup>

Why does Paul say "Now I'm speaking to you Gentiles?" Well, this letter is written to the church in Rome, which is comprised of Jews and Gentiles. You may remember that when this church began in Rome, it was probably predominantly Jewish. But with the persecution of the Jews in Rome, all Jews had to leave the city for a time. Then, the church was solely Gentile. When Jews were allowed back into Rome, the Jewish Christians came into the church community and they were the minority. How were the Jews and Gentiles to relate to each other and even view each other. As we read on in Romans, it seems as though the Gentile Christians were feeling superior to the Jews and were essentially thinking the Jews were living in the past and needed to move on.

Based on what Paul says here, it seems like the Gentiles might have even argued that Gentiles were the emphasis now because Paul was an apostle to the Gentiles. So, Paul says, "I'm talking to you, Gentiles." Or, "Listen up, Gentiles!" So, as fellow Gentiles here, let's listen to what Paul says. Paul says if these things he's written are true, then he magnifies his ministry to the Gentiles. Why? Not simply because God is planning to save Gentiles, but he makes his ministry known so that his fellow Jews would be saved.

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<sup>6</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:12.

<sup>7</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:13–14.

By the way, in the English Standard version, it says “my fellow Jews.” But in the Greek, it’s literally “my flesh.” He loves his flesh and blood! And God loves the Jews as well. God intends to make them jealous through Gentile salvation.

This is why I loved the quote that I shared with you earlier. Are we a place that if Jews came into contact with us, they’d be jealous of God’s work in our midst? Are we living as faithful Kingdom representatives with one another, caring for each other, loving, serving and proclaiming our Savior? What would Jews think if they entered in and watched our worship, listened to our message?

Now, please hear me, Paul doesn’t say here that he might save all. He says “save some.” Oh, and by the way, Paul isn’t saying that he’s the Savior by saying this. We should understand from the context of this book that Paul clearly emphasizes that Jesus is the Savior. So, let’s not get mad at Paul when he says that he might save some. His goal and hope is that he might simply see some come to trust and follow Jesus.

This reminds me of the story of the man who was on the beach throwing starfish back into the ocean. When asked what he was doing, he said he was saving starfish. Well, there were too many starfish to count and someone said, “What’s the point. So many are going to die.” And the man, while throwing a starfish back says, “But not this one.” Remember what I said last week about God’s salvation? We shouldn’t be upset with God that many will reject God and be punished. We should be amazed that God is going to save any. And, with that knowledge, Paul teaches us Gentiles! He says that we should be concerned even about *some* coming to salvation!

This would change how the Gentiles view their Jewish brothers and sisters in the church, wouldn’t it? They have to think that Paul’s apostleship isn’t only for the Gentiles. It’s for the Gentiles because it’s also *for* the Jews coming to salvation by God making them jealous for the Lord!

But now Paul seems to state something he’s already stated in the previous verses. And while, in some ways, verse 15 is a repeat, Paul is leading to a greater argument, and verse 15 gives some exciting realities here. Look at verse 15: <sup>15</sup> For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?<sup>8</sup>

“Their rejection” is not talking about them rejecting God, but God rejecting them. But Paul makes clear that their rejection wasn’t complete and utter rejection because he asks, “what will their acceptance mean?” This is the similar question Paul asks in verse 12. In verse 12, he doesn’t answer the question. What will their full number mean?

Now, you could say, “Yes, he does answer this. In verses 11 and 12, that the blessings they receive is salvation and riches in God. I think what Paul is saying here is, “that reconciliation with God has come to Gentiles because of the Jewish rejection,” but when Paul says “how much more with their full inclusion and when he asks, “what will their acceptance mean” refers to something that is yet to happen.

From a linguistic perspective, Paul is arguing from lesser to greater. And Paul has said that they’re essentially living in days when God has rejected Israel in large part – even though he’s saving few Jews. But Paul seems to indicate here that there’s a day when there will be the full inclusion – which are also the days of acceptance.

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<sup>8</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:15.

If you recall in my sermon last week, I mentioned that in the Deuteronomy passage that Paul quotes from, Moses declares that God has hardened Israel. And Paul says that hardening is *to this day*. But Moses also prophesies a day when the hardening will cease. I think this is what Paul is talking about here. A hardening has come upon Israel to this day. And, as Israel is hardened, Gentiles are being brought in. As Gentiles are being brought in, God is giving hints to Israel that he still has not forsaken them. He is saving some. But someday, there will be what I believe to be a mass salvation of Jewish people.

And I believe this is future even based on the wording of Paul in verse 15. When he states the blessing for the Gentiles when the Jews are finally accepted – and no longer rejected – he says the blessing is life from the dead. Most commentators believe this is referring to physical resurrection from the dead. So, some people could read this and think, “Oh, this isn’t talking about a future day. This is just saying that Jews and Gentiles experience new life in Jesus.” But the words here used by Paul are used predominantly to refer to physical resurrection (see Schreiner, p. 599).

Therefore, I believe Paul is saying that once there is this Jewish acceptance in the future, the final thing to happen is the resurrection. Jesus will come at the Second Coming and he will then restore his Kingdom!

Is this amazing or what? When we look at Israel’s rejection, we can be tempted to think God has failed, but God shows us through Paul that his plan is going perfectly and gloriously. Now, as I say all of this, remember what our conclusion should be to all of this. Some of you might sit here and say, “I don’t agree with you, Pastor Timothy. I’m adamant on my position – and you’re wrong.” But Romans 11 should lead us to adoration and worship of God. We shouldn’t come to this and say, “I know everything,” but instead we should be saying, “This is just the tip of the iceberg, and I see God’s amazing ways!”

Through rejection, there is acceptance, and through future acceptance of Jews, there’s eternal life. There will be a day when Jesus returns and we will feast in the House of Zion for all eternity!

**Has God rejected the Jews? Not fully. He has a plan to draw the full number to himself, and therefore, we should be praying for the Jewish people. We should also see this text as a call to seek first the Kingdom while pursuing Jesus together. May we be empowered by God to make the Jews jealous and thus see some saved.**

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