

IT AIN'T OVER 'TIL IT'S OVER ROMANS 11:1-10

By Pastor John Carlini, D.Mn

EVEN THOUGH THE WORLD AROUND US LOOKS CHAOTIC AND OUT OF CONTROL, WE CAN BE SURE GOD HAS NOT GIVEN UP ON THE HUMAN RACE AND STILL DESIRES THAT PEOPLE FIND HIM AND FALL IN LOVE WITH HIM.

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I know that it's easy to get lost in this section of Romans, so let me highlight some of the themes that have been surfacing in chapters 9-11. God predestines people. Other terms for this phenomenon are that He calls people, He chooses people, or He elects people. He calls nations as well as individuals, and He gathers people from different nations and gathers them together and calls them as a group.

There also appears to be some human freedom and responsibility that goes along with this predestination of God. We have seen tragic choices as God left Egypt in ruins because of Pharaoh's rebellion, and we have seen the nation of Israel lose a unique status with God because of her rejection of Jesus as the Promised Messiah.

In talking about God's sovereignty and divine election, along with human freedom to choose, we said that we must not sacrifice the integrity of either one in trying to reconcile them. I don't think that we have the human vocabulary or categories to reconcile these two truths so my method has been to preach them both as the text calls for and try to live with the truths, side by side in tension. God is sovereign, we are free. It seems to me that the Bible asserts both of these truths.

Last time, we said that God elects people to be saved and all that call on Jesus' Name will be saved. However, the Apostle Paul made it just as clear that God's method of salvation depends on us being the messengers of His offer of salvation to human beings.

We left off saying that we should not be surprised that very few people decide to give their lives to Jesus Christ for salvation; primarily we talked about those who remained lost.

This week, Paul will talk about the few who do receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The point is, not many people really do want to hear from God.

Let me give you an example: You remember that church that I used to pastor, the one that was so tough. (How tough was it?) I had a board member who had been a faithful prayer for many years, but after some years, he started to wonder whether or not God heard his prayers.

We were on a board retreat, and during our prayer time, he opened his eyes, looked up and shouted, “Can anybody up there hear me?” As you can imagine, the rest of us were getting a little freaked out. But he continued, “Hey God, if you can really hear me, tell me what you want me to do with my life.”

A voice from heaven thundered a reply, “I want you to help the needy, give your money and your life to win souls for My Kingdom.”

Faced with more of a challenge than the deacon wanted, he said, “Actually God, I was just checking to see if you were there.”

To which the voice from heaven responded with disappointment, “That’s all right; I was only checking to see if you were there.”

That would never happen here. Our board members are ready to serve.

After last week’s message, we may be wondering why we should evangelize, after all, we painted a pretty bleak picture. We should expect people to reject us and the good

news of salvation God has to offer. People reject Jesus because either they can't understand the message, or because they just don't want to accept it.

But today's passage gives us the reason for telling people about Jesus Christ. You see: **EVEN THOUGH THE WORLD AROUND US LOOKS CHAOTIC AND OUT OF CONTROL, WE CAN BE SURE GOD HAS NOT GIVEN UP ON THE HUMAN RACE AND STILL DESIRES THAT PEOPLE FIND HIM AND FALL IN LOVE WITH HIM.** I think it's awfully easy to get discouraged in this world. We tell people about Jesus, and we don't get much response. I don't know if I'm a naturally upbeat person, but I don't have that negative outlook on life.

Or perhaps it's because I'm an old baseball person, I have been involved in too many 'come from behind' victories to ever give up. And let me tell you that 'come from behind' victories are really a rush. A baseball game isn't over until the last out in the 9th inning. That's why Yogi Berra used to say, "It ain't over 'til it's over." I am the guy who always wants my last bats.

I. A PERSONAL PROOF (Vs. 1-2a)
AS BORN AGAIN CHRISTIANS, WE SHOULD ALL HAVE A PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF GOD'S CARE AND LOVE.

The Apostle Paul thinks this way as well. He is certain that God has not given up on His chosen people, Israel. I am sure that God has not given up on the world today. Paul gives three proofs. One is personal, one is historical, and one is experiential.

In verse 1 through the first half of verse 2, Paul gives a personal proof. For all of us, we should take note that: **AS BORN AGAIN CHRISTIANS, WE SHOULD ALL HAVE A PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF GOD'S CARE AND LOVE.** The question

that has dominated this section for Paul is, “If Israel is God’s chosen people, how could so many of them reject Jesus as their Savior?” He asked earlier if God’s election failed.

A. DOES GOD STILL CARE? (V. 1a)

Here in the first half of verse 1 he asks, “Does God still care for His people?” Only he asks the question in the negative. Paul wonders if the fact that Israel as a nation rejected Jesus was this an indication that God had all ready rejected the Jews. Do you ever look around at life in the United States and wonder if God has given up on us? Or certainly as we look at the entire world, it appears that evil has overtaken the good. It appears that the world has become a dangerous, unfriendly, chaotic place to live. People are filled with fear and confusion. We would have to ask with Paul, “Has God given up on human beings?”

B. I AM PROOF OF HIS CONTINUED CARE. (V. 1b)

Look at the second half of verse 1. He doesn’t give us time to ponder it, in fact, in the Greek, he phrases the question in a way that expects the “no” answer. He says quickly, “By no means! May it never be! Say it ain’t so!” Look at his proof that God had not abandoned Israel because Paul says, “I have received salvation through Jesus ... and I myself am a Jew.” His argument is pretty compelling. He in essence is saying, “I am part of God’s chosen people. I am a Jew. God elected me. He saved me and He has appointed me to be a messenger of His salvation message. Therefore, if I am a Jew, and God saved me, He is still saving His chosen people, the Jews.”

He goes on to emphasize his Jewish pedigree. He is a descendant of Abraham, and specifically from the tribe of Benjamin, here I wonder why he added the tribe of Benjamin phrase. We know that Paul was on the fast track of Jewish leadership. He was

from a very religious sect, and he was educated under perhaps the most famous Rabbi, Gamaliel. He tells us in other New Testament passages, that he was from the tribe of Benjamin ... but I wonder if others have noticed this as well. I haven't read it in any other commentaries. So be cautious and weigh it for what it's worth as I explain what struck me.

Paul's Hebrew name was Saul and here he reminds us that he is from the tribe of Benjamin. Keep in mind we are in the section of Romans that has to deal with God's election and human response to that election. When I think about these things, my mind is drawn immediately to another Saul from the tribe of Benjamin, King Saul, Israel's first king, God chose him to be the first king. King Saul, God's chosen, would lead God's chosen people, Israel. God put His Spirit in King Saul in a powerful way; however, along the way King Saul became disobedient to God and started to do things his own way. God took His Spirit away from Saul, abandoned him, and rejected him as king. Did that mean that God abandoned and rejected the nation of Israel? No. On the contrary, God chose David to become king, and David became the greatest king in the whole history of Israel. David led the nation of Israel to great heights. In fact, Jesus came from the ancestry of David. So, again, we are reminded of God's election and our free choice in response to His election.

C. GOD STILL CARES! (V. 2a)

Paul wants us to see this tension between God's sovereign will and our free choice and in the first half of verse 2 Paul emphatically states that God still cares! God did not reject the Jews. Paul's argument is that if God rejected the Jews, then he himself would not have been able to become a believer in Jesus.

Has God given up on this world? Does God still care? If you have given your life to Christ and received salvation, then you are living proof that God still cares. I think that we as individual Christians and we corporately as a church must remember that we are called to powerful reminders to the dark and dangerous world that God still cares and desires for people to be saved. Our lives and our words should be inviting people to come to Jesus: **AS BORN AGAIN CHRISTIANS, WE SHOULD ALL HAVE A PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF GOD’S CARE AND LOVE.**

I hope that we can all tell about God’s personal love for us. If you think about it, that moment when God elected us to salvation is the most important moment in any of our lives. It far surpasses anything or anyone.

II. AN HISTORICAL PROOF (Vs. 2b-6)
IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE CASE THAT EVIL AND CHAOS SEEM TO DOMINATE HUMAN EXISTENCE, BUT THE FACT IS, GOD WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE IN THE END.

So Paul has given us personal proof that God still loves Israel and has not given up on her. In the second half of verse 2 through verse 6 Paul gives historical proof. I would like us to remember this: **IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE CASE THAT EVIL AND CHAOS SEEM TO DOMINATE HUMAN EXISTENCE, BUT THE FACT IS, GOD WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE IN THE END.** I think that it is important for us to remember that since in our natural state, human beings have an attraction to evil; we should expect that believing Christians will always be in the minority. If Paul had been a baseball guy, I think he would say something like, “It is the bottom of ninth inning, there are two outs, and our last batter has two strikes on her. Let the rally begin!

A. IT ALWAYS LOOKS BAD IN THE EARLY INNINGS (Vs. 2b-3)

In the second half of verse 2 through verse 3 it seems as if the standard operating procedure is that it always looks bad in the early innings. Paul says to the church in Rome, “Don’t you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah – how he appealed to God against Israel?”

There are two things here. First, Paul is going to describe a very important theological Old Testament concept; it is technically called the remnant. Israel is a nation like no other nation and Jews are people like no other people. When talking about Israel, Jews, or Israelites, we could be talking about national Israel, political Israel, cultural Israel, social Israel, or religious Israel. The same applies to individuals; one could be Jewish nationally, politically, socially, culturally, or religiously. In Old Testament history, even when the whole nation of Israel turns away from God, and chases after false gods, it’s as if there are always a few who remain faithful to worshipping only the God of the Bible. They are referred to as the remnant. Their story is developed throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.

Second, when Paul says to the church, “Don’t you know what the Scripture says in regards to Elijah,” he is really saying something like, “Surely you remember the story of Elijah. Don’t you understand how that fits here?”

The early church, both Jew and Gentile did know the stories in the Bible, but I’m sorry to say that most Christians have no idea of what’s in the Old Testament. People actually tell me that the Bible, especially the Old Testament is boring. They are not reading the same Bible I am. I’m going to tell you the story of Elijah the prophet so this passage will make sense to you. Elijah lived during the time when the evil King Ahab and the wicked Queen Jezebel ruled in Israel. They were decadent and perverted in every

way. The nation followed in their footsteps where people started exploiting the poor, they became sexually perverted, and it seemed as if the whole nation stopped worshipping God. They turned to witchcraft, fortune telling, and followed all sorts of strange religions; in fact one religion they embraced encouraged sacrificing children. The whole nation went berserk. The king and queen had all of God's prophets killed. Finally, God's Spirit came upon Elijah in a mighty way. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel called for a national manhunt looking for Elijah with a bounty on his head. They wanted him dead.

Elijah had enough. He publicly challenged the King. He said to Ahab, "Tomorrow ... Mt. Carmel ... You and your 900 false prophets, let's get it on ... Oh, by the way, have the people of Israel there to watch."

Well how could the King refuse? This was the moment he had been waiting for; he would now publicly humiliate and kill this religious fanatic.

Well morning came. At the top of Mt. Carmel, Elijah stood alone against 900 false prophets and the King. It was like the Super Bowl, people from all over Israel came to watch. Before the contest, Elijah addressed the crowd. He said, "How long will you continue to rebel against God. Now pay careful attention, or you may miss something." Since Elijah was a gentleman, he said to the king and his guys, "We'll set up sacrifices and then see which god comes to burn it up. You go first."

Well, all morning long, the 900 false prophets chanted, prayed and sang out to their false god. But alas, nothing happened. You think that today's sport's figures trash talk, but they are nothing compared to Elijah. Elijah looked at his watch, the morning had passed. It was about noon, and nothing was happening. Now he starts to trash talk

when he says to them, “Boys, maybe you need to shout a little louder. Perhaps he can’t hear you. Jump a little higher. Perhaps you can get his attention. Oh, I just thought of something. Since he is your god, maybe he is busy. He could be meditating in deep thought. He may be on vacation ... Ohhh; he might be in the toilet sitting on the can. No, I know, he might just be sleeping. Wake him up.”

So now these guys get crazy. They start yelling and they start cutting themselves hoping to get their god to do something for them. A couple more hours pass and these guys are exhausted, they’re lying there bleeding, frustrated, and spent.

Elijah steps up. He cuts his bull up into pieces, quietly lays it on the altar and thinks, “This is too easy. Why just lay it up, when you can windmill slam dunk it?” He says, “O.K. boys, tell you what. Pour buckets of water over this bull. Soak the entire altar. Soak it up until the entire trough around it is filled with water. Waterlog it.”

Then he turned to the crowd and said, “Pay attention. In a minute, you will know who God is and how pathetic you have been in following this wicked king. He stepped back, quietly said to God, “O.K. God I got their attention, do Your thing.” Out of nowhere, fire falls on this sacrifice. It burns up the bull, the wood, the stones, and the ground around it and for good measure, the fire licked up the water that was in the trenches.

The crowd more than oohed and aahed. The crowd fell down and cried out, “Jehovah and Jehovah alone is the God of Israel.”

You’ve all seen these soccer riots on television? Well Elijah looked at the crowd and said, “Do the right thing.” The crowd came onto the field, grabbed all 900 false prophets and killed them.

The king managed to get out of there before the rioting started and Elijah slipped away. You would think that Elijah would be flying high except for the fact that the Queen now took this really personal and swore she would kill him. Elijah went away, and while he was alone began to get depressed. He said to God, and here is the quote in today's passage, "Lord, they (meaning the whole nation of Israel) have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me."

When we are at school, at work, in social situations, I'm pretty sure we have felt like Elijah. We feel that we are the only Christian in our work place or at school. If we let ourselves, it is easy to become discouraged in our thinking, "If I open my mouth for Jesus, I'll get killed (ridiculed)." I think if we look at the way our society is going, it looks like we don't have a voice at all. Christians are made to look foolish. It is acceptable to talk about and affirm any religious belief except that of Jews and Christians. It appears that the Devil has the upper hand.

B. GOD'S LATE INNING RALLIES (V. 4)

But verse 4 describes one of God's famous late inning rallies. God's the manager who always has one more trick up his sleeve. He says to Elijah, "I have reserved for Myself, I have elected, I have preserved 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal." In other words even though Elijah thinks he is the only one faithful to God, God reminds him that he is not alone. There are 7,000 others. This is descriptive of that remnant theology we have been talking about. This is the faithful Israel living in the midst of national Israel who had become unfaithful to God.

I would encourage you to be clear and vocal about God's work in your life. You will be surprised to see how many Christians start to come out of the woodwork. As

Christians, it really doesn't matter what the government says or does. We are to make our decisions based on what the Word of God says. Whether or not America becomes or acts Anti-Christian is really irrelevant to Christians. It is not important if we are in the mainstream or whether our culture marginalizes us. In Egypt things got increasingly worse before God rallied for them in the last inning. In the Tribulation, things will rapidly look worse and worse for believers, until God starts the rally in the last inning.

C. THE FINAL SCORE IS WHAT COUNTS (Vs. 5-6)

Because you see, as verses 5-6 remind us, it's the final score that counts. Paul makes the connection between history and the present. This remnant ... this faithful remnant of Israel remains today, just as it did in Elijah's day. In fact by the time Paul became a Christian, there were already thousands of Jews who gave their lives to Jesus in faith. Peter got up at Pentecost, preached a sermon, and thousands of Jews were saved. The early church was primarily Jewish, in fact the first church council dealt with the problem of how to handle Gentile believers. So even though the Jewish political and religious leaders rejected Jesus, many Jews, a significant number of Jews, put their faith in Christ. And again, Paul reminds us that it all came about as a result of God's grace. It had nothing to do with religious works. Before Paul became a Christian, he was a very religious guy. Paul + religious works = persecuting and killing Christians. Then one day, with no initiative of his own, Jesus came to meet and confront Paul face to face. It was only by grace that Jesus came to turn Paul's life around. Paul gave his life to Jesus. Paul + grace = winning the world for Christ.

We need to constantly remind one another that we are not better than any one else. If we are Christians, it is not because we are good, nor will we ever be good. We

are saved only because God predestined us, He hunted us down, and He turned us around, just like He did for the Apostle Paul. We were all blinded by Satan and this world. We were born losing. We looked bad in the early innings. But it is God's late inning rally that saved us, and because we have taken the lead, we will win because it's the final score that counts: **IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE CASE THAT EVIL AND CHAOS SEEM TO DOMINATE HUMAN EXISTENCE, BUT THE FACT IS, GOD WILL SAVE HIS PEOPLE IN THE END.** So it should be the case that we have confidence that God is still seeking the lost because of how faithfully He has done that throughout history, and how He has faithfully done it in our own personal lives.

III. AN EXPERIENTIAL PROOF (Vs. 7-10)
THERE ALWAYS SEEMS TO BE THIS COOPERATION BETWEEN GOD'S ELECTION AND HIS CHILDREN'S RESPONSE.

But there is yet one more proof. Verses 7-10 demonstrate an experiential truth. Let's not forget about this predestination stuff.

A. THE ANALYSIS OF VICTORY (V. 7a)

The first half of verse 7 gives us the post game analysis of the victory. Israel was earnestly looking for the Messiah. Actually they were looking for freedom, liberation, control and domination. They wanted to overthrow the Roman Empire and become the new world empire. Messiah was just the means to that end.

The Jewish remnant, those who were looking for Messiah and the Gentiles who received Jesus as Messiah found freedom and liberation. They were freed from the domination of sin and Satan. They were liberated from fear. They were truly free because now they had entered a right relationship with God. They received strength to live everyday life. And Paul reminds us that not only will we someday rule the universe

with Christ, but we are seated in the heavenlies already with Him. He is holding our place for us. We received these things because God chose us for it.

Here is the human freedom part playing in this equation again. God has already determined the outcome of the game. We have been chosen to win. However, we must still go out onto the field of life and play the game.

There's a story about Yogi Berra that took place during his playing days, he was a catcher. One day, a batter came up to bat, took his place in the batter's box, and made the sign of the cross with his bat on home plate. Yogi immediately dusted it off and said to the batter, "Let's let God just sit back and enjoy the game." That was a great saying, but very poor theology. The fact is God enjoys the game because He has ordained the winning outcome for us. I think if we were to ask ourselves why we are saved today, we can clearly see that it was not our goodness that led us to Christ; it was His predestination and His leading. So the final analysis of those who know Christ is that we are saved clearly by grace through faith. We don't deserve a thing we have and so we continue to live by grace through faith. And even though we sin every day, we will make it home to heaven by grace through faith. That's the winning strategy.

C. THE ANALYSIS OF A LOSS (Vs. 7b-10)

In the second half of verse 7 through verse 10 we encounter the analysis of a loss. Once again, Paul is going to quote from each major section of the Hebrew Bible. He is going to quote from the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. From the Law he quotes Moses. After informing the Israelites of the curses that will come on them if they turn away from God, he assesses where they are spiritually. He reminds them that even though they saw God deliver them from Egypt with their own eyes, and even though they

experienced God's provision and presence for 40 years in the wilderness, they still don't have a heart for God. That's what these verses are all about. Then Moses went on to predict Israel's national rebellion against God, God's judgment of them, and then God's restoration. Moses predicts the national rejection of God.

The passage in the prophets here comes from Isaiah. His prediction renews Moses' warning, right before it is about to happen. Israel as a nation had turned away from God and the nation was about to be destroyed by the Babylonian Empire. Even though they had seen and heard all that God had done for them, they insisted on disobeying God and doing their own thing. Just as God hardened Pharaoh, just as God took His Spirit from King Saul and sent him a tormenting spirit, just as God cuts immoral people loose and let's them destroy themselves, so did He harden national Israel's heart, and so is He hardening the hearts of unbelievers today.

And then in verses 9-10, Paul quotes from the writings; this is from King David's Psalm. David was being pursued relentlessly by enemies; his prayer was that God would stand up, defend him, and punish his enemies. Those who reject Jesus will face ultimate punishment and experience the wrath of God. Why? Because Jesus is the One who absorbed the full wrath of God on our behalf. If we reject Jesus, then we are rejecting the only provision God has given us for escaping His wrath. What's the analysis of a losing strategy? Ignore God's way, and do it your own way. Pride and arrogance bring destruction. Humility and submission bring victory. God predestines us for victory, but we must still take the field and play the game. Even though I don't understand it, and even though I cannot reconcile it: **THERE ALWAYS SEEMS TO BE THIS**

COOPERATION BETWEEN GOD'S ELECTION AND HIS CHILDREN'S RESPONSE.

Part of maturing in our faith; and part of learning to enjoy our journey through life comes when we learn to trust God's election as we live in it boldly: **EVEN THOUGH THE WORLD AROUND US LOOKS CHAOTIC AND OUT OF CONTROL, WE CAN BE SURE GOD HAS NOT GIVEN UP ON THE HUMAN RACE AND STILL DESIRES THAT PEOPLE FIND HIM AND FALL IN LOVE WITH HIM.**

Listen to this great little story that describes the attitude we are after as God's elect children.

How Do You Think Of God?

As first I saw God as my observer, my judge, keeping track of the things I did wrong, so as to know whether I merited heaven or hell when I die. He was out there sort of like the president. I recognized His picture when I saw it, but I didn't really know Him.

But later on when I recognized this Higher Power, it seemed as though life was rather like a bike ride, but it was a tandem bike, and I noticed that God was in the back helping me pedal.

I don't know just when it was that he suggested we change places, but like has not been the same since --- life with my Higher Power, that is. God makes life exciting!

But when He took the lead, it was all I could do to hang on! He knew delightful paths, up mountains and through rocky places --- and at breakneck speeds. Even though it looked like madness, he said, "Pedal!"

I worried and was anxious and asked, "Where are you taking me?" He laughed and didn't answer, and I started to learn trust.

I forgot my boring life and entered into adventure. When I'd say, "I'm scared," He'd lean back and touch my hand.

He took me to people with gifts that I needed, gifts of healing, acceptance, and joy. They gave me their gifts to take on my journey, our journey, God's and mine.

And we were off again. He said, "Give the gifts away; they're extra baggage, too much weight." So I did, to the people we met, and I found that in giving I received, and our burden became light.

At first I did not trust Him in control of my life. I thought He'd wreck it, but He knows bike secrets --- knows how to make it lean to take sharp corners, dodge large rocks, and speed through scary passages.

And I am learning to shut up and pedal in the strangest places. I'm beginning to enjoy the view and the cool breeze on my face with my delightful constant Companion.

And when I'm sure I just can't do any more, He just smiles and says, "Pedal!"