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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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God's Tireless Efforts to Reach Israel

Romans 10:16-21

I. A Different Picture of God... But Not Contradictory

A. Romans 9: Clear Picture of God as Sovereign

1. Issue before us: Israel's almost universal rejection of Christ
2. Paul's great concern: "It is not as though God's word has failed"
3. Romans 9: Paul's first answer to the problem... the Sovereign, Unconditional Election of God

Romans 9:11-12 before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-- in order that God's purpose in election might stand: ¹² not by works but by him who calls-- she was told, "The older will serve the younger."

4. Statement after statement establish God as absolute in the matter of human salvation

Romans 9:15-16 "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

Romans 9:18 Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

B. Romans 10: Clear Picture of God as Making a Constant Appeal

1. Amazing statement of God's persevering appeal to wandering, unbelieving Israel

Romans 10:21 But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

2. God is like the father of the Prodigal Son, waiting for the Son to return from sin
3. Christ made a similar statement

Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

4. Popular depictions of a waiting Savior

- a. Painting of Christ knocking at the door... Revelation 3:20
- b. Hymns like "The Savior is waiting"

The Savior Is Waiting

The Savior is waiting to enter your heart,
 Why don't you let Him come in?
 There's nothing in this world to keep you apart,
 What is your answer to Him?

Time after time He has waited before,
 And now He is waiting again
 To see if you're willing to open the door:
 O how He wants to come in.

If you'll take one step toward the Savior, my friend,
 You'll find His arms open wide;
 Receive Him, and all of your darkness will end,
 Within your heart He'll abide.

C. Church Tragedy: To Deny One or the Other

1. Very difficult for human minds to reconcile these seemingly contradictory pictures of God
2. People who want to emphasize the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation are very uncomfortable with this picture of a seemingly powerless Savior, waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting, and seemingly leaving the final determination of the matter to human will

Dr. van Baren, in an article on Irresistible Grace: Cited three examples of this...

First, I have a check, dated: "Anytime, anywhere." It is written out on the "Bank of the Riches of Jesus --Resources Unlimited." It is written out to be paid to the order of the bearer on demand "his need according to the riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Among other things, the explanation on the back states this: "Will you take Him today as your Savior? Friend, don't turn Him away. He's waiting to receive you. He is longing to bless and to save you. He wants to give you eternal life. And if you accept Him, he will fill your soul with a joy such as you have never known in all your life and make you a child of God, an heir of God, and a

joint-heir with Jesus Christ." **Now I ask you, what kind of God is this Who must await the endorsement of the sinner before He can confer upon him this salvation?**

A second exhibit. I have a **ballot, an opportunity to vote for your salvation**. This "ballot" has also been widely distributed to promote "acceptances" of Christ. There are three who vote on this ballot, and each can vote in one of two ways. First, God votes - and He votes "yes" for your salvation. Secondly, the devil votes - and he votes "no." Then there is your vote - and two possibilities are presented: "yes" or "no." Your vote becomes the deciding vote. The idea is that man's final salvation is determined by himself. **And I ask again, what kind of God is this Who, though He votes, must await your vote before your salvation is finally determined?**

There is something very offensive to people who emphasize the truths of Romans 9 of a depiction of God waiting patiently and offering salvation to rebellious people

3. Conversely, people who want to emphasize the need for a human decision, the need for a human being to act, to choose, to believe, to receive, to come, are very uncomfortable with the picture of God as an all-powerful sovereign, deciding ultimately who will be saved and who will not

4. WE NEED TO KEEP BOTH IN FRONT OF US!!!

- a. It is a great tragedy to the gospel to deny the sovereignty of God over human salvation...
 - i) we declare our faith in it every time we drop to our knees and plead with God in prayer for the soul of a lost spouse, child, relative, friend;
 - ii) we declare our faith in God's sovereignty over salvation every time we step boldly out into some seemingly impossible missions situation... maybe to extremist Muslims, and trust God for results
 - iii) We must absolutely rely on this central doctrine: God is sovereign over everything in His universe...
 - iv) A God who is merely kind and well-meaning but who never interferes with human will is no Savior at all
- b. BUT it is just as great a tragedy to deny the need for passionate appeals to lost sinners based on the picture of God here

Vs. 21 concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

- i) God extends His arms ALL DAY LONG to rebellious sinners
- ii) We must be those arms reaching out to sinners, pleading with them even with tears: "Why will you die? Why will you perish eternally?"

- iii) Remember the passion the Apostle Peter showed on the day of Pentecost, pleading with Jews to trust in Christ

Acts 2:40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

- c. BOTH of these are taught in the Bible, sometimes side by side... divine election, and a passionate appeal to sinners to come, to trust, to believe, to receive

Matthew 11:25-30 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. ²⁷ "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

John 6:35-37 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away."

- d. I yearn to be part of a church that believes BOTH Romans 9 and 10, and holds them together: God is sovereign over individual, human salvation AND passionate, patient, persuasive appeals MUST be made to sinners

II. Israel's Stumbling Block: The Word of Faith vs. Works of the Law

Romans 9:31-33 Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. ³² Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the "stumbling stone." ³³ As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

A. Big Picture: The Question of Romans 9-11

1. Burning issue with Paul: why are so many of the Jews, the descendents of Abraham, rejecting their Messiah and perishing eternally as a result
2. Central question: Has God's word to Israel failed?
3. A two-fold answer
 - a. God's eternal, sovereign, unconditional election: Romans 9

b. The willful choice of the Jews to reject the gospel: Romans 10

B. At the Human Level: Why Israel Rejected Christ (Romans 10)

1. Israel Sought to Establish Their Own Righteousness (vs. 3-4)

Romans 10:3-4 Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴ Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

2. Israel Refused God's Righteousness in Christ (vs. 3-4)

3. Righteousness a Simple Gift, Not a Stunning Achievement (vs. 5-7)

4. God's Righteousness Comes By Believing the Proclaimed Word of Faith (vs. 8-10)

Romans 10:8-10 "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: ⁹ That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

5. This Offer of Righteousness is Open for ALL (vs. 11-13)

Romans 10:11-13 As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

C. Proclamation of the Word of Faith Essential to Salvation (vs. 14-15)

Romans 10:14-15 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

D. Faith Comes By Hearing, and Hearing by Christ's Word (vs. 17)

Romans 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

E. BUT Israel Did Not Obey the Gospel

^{ESV} Romans 10:16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel.

1. The gospel is a command to be obeyed

Mark 1:15 *"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

2. Not all Israel obeyed that command

F. Israel's Unbelief Predicted by Isaiah the Prophet

1. God's word has not failed... for seven centuries before Jesus was born, Isaiah the prophet predicted it

^{ESV} **Romans 10:16** *But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?"*

2. God knew long in advance that Israel would reject their Messiah, specifically because He was the "Suffering Servant," the dying Messiah

Isaiah 53:2-6 *He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

This picture of a suffering, dying Messiah was brutally offensive to the Jews, and Isaiah predicted they would misunderstand His mission and reject Him

III. God Leaves Israel No Excuse (vs. 16-21)

A. Excuse #1: "We've never heard"

1. BUT Widespread Proclamation of the Word of Faith Has Happened (vs. 18)

Romans 10:18 *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."*

2. A remarkable citation of Psalm 19, which really speaks of the way God reveals Himself in physical creation

a. The rising and setting of the sun every day gives clear testimony to the existence of God the creator

b. This testimony goes all over the world, wherever the sun rises and sets

3. In like manner, God has sent forth His messengers of the gospel, and even at that early stage in Church History, they had made amazing progress

Romans 15:18-24 I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done--¹⁹ by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

Paul there is claiming that he has preached the gospel from Jerusalem to modern-day Yugoslavia, right across from Italy... an amazing achievement! But he says more:

²⁰ It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. ²¹ Rather, as it is written: "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand." ²² This is why I have often been hindered from coming to you. ²³ But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you, ²⁴ I plan to do so when I go to Spain.

Paul has so saturated the northern region of the Mediterranean Sea with the gospel that there was no more place for him to work if he wanted to preach where Christ was not known

Colossians 1:23 This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

It is especially important for us to note that Paul's usual procedure was to go to the Jews in every locale first, to the synagogue first, and reason with them from the Scripture

4. The ultimate end of this gospel mission would be to every tribe and language and people and nation

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

So, the Jews cannot say, "We never heard! We didn't know!!!"

B. Excuse #2: "We Did Not Understand"

Romans 10:19-20 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." ²⁰ 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."

1. They might argue, "We didn't understand the message! We didn't know what the gospel meant!"

2. Perhaps they heard the words, but they failed to understand the significance or meaning of what was being communicated
3. Paul's answer to this is amazing: LOOK AT WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE GENTILES
 - a. Paul is quoting the Song of Moses, which Moses gave in Deuteronomy, before they entered the Promised Land
 - b. There Moses predicted all of Israel's history of rebellion against the Lord
 - c. Moses also predicted how God would rebuke and chasten Israel: by using the Gentiles
 - d. First, the Gentiles would conquer and subjugate Israel in their own land... for centuries
 - e. Then (amazingly and mysteriously) God would convert idol-worshiping pagan Gentiles to faith in the true God and in His Messiah, Jesus Christ
4. Gentiles Did Not Understand ANYTHING about God, and yet God saved them
 - a. The Gentiles were a people with NO UNDERSTANDING... no prior history, no prophetic message... nothing but centuries of darkened minds and hearts; God clearly cut through all that and brought them to Christ!

Ephesians 4:17-19 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

- b. Failure to understand is no excuse... God was able to get the message across to them, who were so far away from Him
5. Israel cannot plead "We did not understand" because the Gentiles were turning to the Lord in huge numbers... all Israel had to do was see what they saw: forgiveness of sins is available FREE and BY GRACE
6. "We didn't understand" cannot be an excuse
7. Furthermore, they should have been jealous when they saw God loving and healing and saving Gentiles through Christ... they should have said "I WANT THAT TOO!!" But instead their jealousy turned murderous, like Cain vs. Abel

8. So, the fact that Israel may not have understood who Christ was or how His death on the cross saved them is no excuse... God was saving foolish Gentiles who had no understanding

C. Excuse #3: "God Has Never Revealed Himself to Us"

1. The Jews may complain this
2. They may think God hid Himself from them
3. They may also say, "We were running, we were hiding, we weren't seeking you, so you failed to seek us!"
4. Failure to Seek God No Excuse: God Has Overcome That As Well (vs. 20)

Romans 10:20 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."

5. Paul already told us that NO ONE SEEKS GOD... including the Jews
6. The Gentiles certainly were not seeking God, yet God saved them anyway
7. Here we see the astonishing grace and love of God... the human race universally turned away from God... God was the ultimate jilted lover, the ultimate rejected, unrequited suitor, both toward Jews and Gentiles alike
8. We chose money and sex and power and pleasure and a thousand worldly idols rather than God, and yet He ordained our salvation
9. "I was found by those who did not seek me" = God finally creates a yearning inside their hearts in the end... they DID seek God and He was found by them; but originally no one seeks Him
10. God uncovered His glory to a people who were initially NOT INTERESTED... the Gentiles couldn't have cared less, but then they were shocked, stunned, surprised by grace
11. The Apostle Paul came to town, and His miracles got their attention; but his words cut through their hearts... they awoke idolaters, and went to bed Christians
12. AND ALL THIS BY THE AWESOME POWER OF GOD TO SAVE
13. The Jews saw all this, yet they still didn't come, didn't trust Christ

D. Israel Has No Excuse: God's Constant Appeal (vs. 21)

Romans 10:21 But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

1. For centuries God has been dealing with the Jews, whom He called “a stiff-necked people”
2. For centuries, He has sent one prophet after another, one messenger after another
3. With astonishing patience, with amazing grace He constantly “held out His hands to a disobedient and obstinate people”
4. “Disobedient” = rebellious, unpersuaded, unbelieving
5. “Obstinate” = stubborn, argumentative, opposing, contradicting... they heard God’s presentation and argued back, talked back, rejected, refuted
6. Summed up perfectly in Christ’s parable of the Vineyard:

Matthew 21:33-41 "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ³⁴ When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. ³⁵ "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷ Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. ³⁸ "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' ³⁹ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰ "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹ "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

This is the long history of God’s dealing with Israel... and now it culminates in their devastating rejection of Christ and of His Gospel

Paul has systematically removed any ground for the Jews... they have no excuse! Salvation is as simple as repentance and trust

Yet even now, you see Paul’s yearning for the Jews to accept this gospel... to know that God’s arms are still extended to them, still reaching out to them

IV. Application #2: Imitating God in Our Evangelism and Missions

A. Patience: “All day long”

1. God waited for centuries before bringing the penalties of the Law of Moses on rebellious Israel
2. God sent one prophet after another to a wicked people

3. God did not give up quickly on Israel
4. Bigger picture: God has been incredibly longsuffering with the human race
5. Application: evangelism must display incredible, supernatural patience

Illus. Adoniram Judson, waiting six years for his first convert

- A wife of an alcoholic husband waiting decades for her husband to be saved
- Parents of rebellious son or daughter, waiting and praying daily for their lost child to come home
- Augustine's mother pleading and praying for her rebellious son to come to faith
- George Mueller waiting on God for sixty years for the conversion of one friend
- Steve, who led me to Christ, witnessing over a period of a year and a half

WE GIVE UP TOO QUICKLY

B. Initiative: "I have held out my hands"

1. This image of God is powerful... it involves extending grace and mercy to sinners to find them where they are
2. It involves finding out where the sinners are, the unreached people groups, the rejects, the modern day equivalents of the "tax collectors and prostitutes" that Jesus spent time with
3. It involves taking a stance in ministry that is inviting and enticing, that is winsome and attractive

C. Passion: "I have held out my hands"

1. I see passion here, too... I see Christ weeping over Jerusalem and God saying through the prophet Ezekiel, "Why will you die, O Israel"
2. I see emotion shown, in holding out our hands to a disobedient and obstinate people
3. I see the passion of Peter on Pentecost

Acts 2:40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."

Passion in evangelism involves risk... it means we could get seriously hurt or seriously rejected

It involves the kind of tears and emotion and risk-taking in a relationship that may mean the relative or co-worker may never speak to you again

D. Persuasion: “I have held out my hands”

1. To hold out our hands also means to be willing to reason with them, to persuade them
2. The Lord said, **“Come, now, let us reason together, says the Lord”**
3. Everywhere the Apostle Paul went, he reasoned with people from the Scriptures
4. We are extending arms to meet actual bodily needs, but we’re also extending rational, biblical persuasion to meet mental needs

E. Suffering: “To a disobedient and obstinate people”

1. Sin is an overwhelmingly powerful force
2. True salvation is so astonishing, only God can do it... only God has the power to break sin’s hold on our hearts
3. Therefore, we should not be surprised at the slow work of the Gospel, or become easily discouraged when we don’t get results
4. Sinners are a disobedient and obstinate people
5. We have to be willing to suffer, to pay the price of holding out our hands to them
6. No salvation can occur without messengers who are willing to suffer what it takes to bring them the gospel with great perseverance

Colossians 1:24 Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

V. Application #2: Faith Comes AND Continues by Hearing God’s Word (vs. 17)

A. Foundational Principle of the Christian Life

Romans 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

B. Faith BEGINS By Hearing the Word

C. Faith is also SUSTAINED by a Constant Hearing of the Word