

God's View of The Jewish Nation

Romans 11:28

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

Loved ones, we are coming now to the end of that part of Romans that has brought us as a body the greatest public opposition. That's the parts of Romans 9-11 where God through Paul has dealt with the rejection of Jesus by his own chosen people, the Jews. It is the section where God through Paul shows us how that rejection of the Jews fits into God's plan for the redemption of the whole world. It seems that now that we are coming to the last verse, it would be good to look back and learn some of the clear lessons that God taught us through this experience of expository preaching.

One is that you don't pick and choose the bits of the Bible that cause you the least trouble. You can't do that. I'm sure a number of you sat here Sunday by Sunday and said, "Pastor, could we not get off the Jews?" Well, loved ones, you can't fiddle around with this dear Book. You can't pick out of it the bits that are pleasant and leave aside the parts that cause you trouble or unpopularity or opposition.

We are like Luther--our conscience is captive to the Word of God. You and I in our own lives have to allow all of God's Word to shine upon our lives, the good bits and the bad; otherwise we ourselves will never be delivered from self. I would encourage your hearts even as you watch me slog through the thing and you slog through it with me. Do you see you can't pick and choose in God's Word? If you commit yourself to the Father's Word, you go with it through thick and thin, should it destroy you or establish you.

Maybe it is good to see, too, that you can't accommodate God's Word to the current whims of the day, or to your own whims, or to the issues that are fashionable in the day. I don't blame the dear religious advisors on campus who did it. That's what I did when was a liberal. I felt this was a mixture of man's word and God's word, and I could pick out the bits that apply to today's whim or fancy and leave the other bits aside.

Today it is fashionable to support the Jewish people. The Holocaust has made it fashionable, the move into the homeland has made it fashionable; and they went in on that issue. This year it will be the Jews for them, next year it will be the Arabs, the following year it will be homosexuals. You cannot do that with God's Word.

God's Word is absolute truth for all seasons and for all times. It stands and remains forever. The whims and fancies, the philanthropic enterprises that men contort God's love into--those will pass; God's Word remains. Loved ones, if you keep respecting it as it is here, not contorting or perverting it or using it to back up your own whim or fancy, it will pull you into Christ's likeness. You can't accommodate God's Word.

The last thing I saw plainly was this. The great majority of the loved ones who are Jewish had no time for the whole thing, but a very small group of them were eventually dragged into the conflict about anti-Semitism. In a way, that very small group confirmed what God's Word says about the true Jewish heart--once you start judging God's Word by yourself, you have become God.

In other words, once I start saying, "Well, I don't like this bit in Daniel because it is anti-Hibernian." I'm Irish. But I do like this bit in Luke because it is pro-Hibernian." Or once you say, "No, I don't like this bit in John because it is anti-Swedish, but I do like this bit in Romans because it is pro-Swedish. This bit in Philippians is true because it is pro-Norwegian." No! Once a cause assumes that kind of priority, intelligent men can no longer respect it. Because that cause has become the touchstone of truth and indeed has set itself up to judge the words that the Creator has spoken. So, loved ones, don't get yourselves into the center of the picture. Whether we are Gentile, Jew, Campus Church, Irish, Scotch, Norwegian, whatever we are, let's not judge God's Word by our position or what we think is right. Let us sit at the bar of Holy Scripture ourselves and be judged by it.

Now let's turn to Paul and the verse in Romans 11:28, lest any of you thought we might tail off mildly. "As regards the gospel they [the Jewish nation] are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers." Who are?

The first thing to clarify is who are "enemies of God for your sake, in regard to the gospels"? We said some Sundays ago that the answer is not all the loved ones who are called Jews. It would be just silly to say that. It certainly doesn't mean all our neighbors who are Jews. We shared that there are great numbers of loved ones who are Jewish simply as a race. That happens to be their racial or family background. That's the way they think of it. If we read that verse to them, they would be as set back by it as we would be when people call us anti-Semitic. They'd feel that's not me. They would say, "My Jewishness isn't something religious to me. Actually I'd have to confess I don't have much religion. I observe the family ceremonies and holidays in the Jewish religion, but I am not a very religious person. To tell you the truth, I'm a pretty secular person. My Jewishness is just my background--the way I was brought up. It's to that extent that you are proud of your Swedish roots, or Norwegian roots or German roots, so I'm proud of mine. I'm afraid I don't practice my religion very much. As far as the Israel nation, they want that but I'm not very enthusiastic about it. I'm first and foremost an American. I happen to be Jewish, but that is more to do with my tradition and some characteristics of my personality than it is to do with my religion."

Loved ones, it is unfair to tackle those people and think that they are the ones that Paul talks about. Because most Jews are very secular in their outlook on life. They are as open to regarding Jesus as the Son of God as many of us are. I think we should see that most Jews are in that position. They are as shocked when you whip that verse on them as we are if people attack us for being anti-Semitic. I think of a number of Jews who have been dealing with some of our businesses. Their reaction has been, "See you got a bit of bad press recently." They think of themselves as utterly apart from it, as not involved in it at all. We need to see that. It saves us from being paranoid, from being unfair and unreal to loved ones who regard their Jewishness just as we regard our Swedishness or Irishness. It is important to see that the great majority of the loved ones who are Jewish are secular Jews, and they are not involved in this verse. They are not enemies of God. Some are even open to Jesus. I think it is good to make this distinction.

There is a second group that we talked about--people like Moshe Dayan and Golda Meir. Both of them are agnostics if not atheists. If you read Golda Meir's biography you probably would see she is really atheist. They don't feel very strongly about the Jewish belief in God at all. They don't feel very strongly against Jesus at all. They are just kind of neutral about it. Indeed, if you read Moshe Dayan's life, you will find that he had a great love for Arabs. They are interested in a homeland for any Jews who want to live somewhere without wandering forever throughout all the nations.

People like Dayan and Golda Meir support the idea of a national homeland as a purely secular concept. Just as we have our countries, they want to have their country. They feel it should be done in such a way that Arabs or Palestinians are not thrown out of theirs. These loved ones are much as we are and they are not really the people referred to in this verse. They are not enemies of God; they are not antagonistic toward Jesus. They are just secular people who believe in a national homeland. We need to see that even though they give their support and like Golda Meir, give their lives to establish Israel. It is done as a secular, national enterprise for the sake of humanity.

Now, I just share with you that many of the well-known Jewish philanthropists that have been a blessing to our society are found in either one of these groups. They tend to be strong humanists and are very open to thoughts about Jesus. Nevertheless, I think it is important to see that the poor souls have necessarily become paranoid because they share not only the wrong attitudes that many people have today, but also much of the hostility that a smaller group of Jews tend to bring upon themselves. We need to recognize that and be as kind and thoughtful and as much brothers and sisters to them as we felt we needed them to be to us.

Then there is a small group, a small minority of Jews who normally call themselves Zionists. It is this very small minority of Jews in the world today who believe that God and the Bible has given them a right to extend the borders of their physical homeland to include at least the original border of the ancient kingdom of David. They believe that the Bible gives them a God-given right to that land. It is theirs by fiat of God. So in their minds, it includes the ancient borders of the kingdom of David.

Now the subtle truth is that most scriptural Christians would agree with them. In a way that is right. The tragedy is, most scriptural Christians think, "Well, then we will identify ourselves wholly with the cause of the Zionists." Actually the vast division between the New Testament and the Zionists' cause is not the final goal. The final goal we both agree upon. Presumably God will give them back their land. But how or when -- those are the issues.

The New Testament teaches that things will go from bad to worse in this present world. We will all eventually settle for totalitarianism instead of anarchy, and we will all bow down to some brilliant genius who will come forth and say, "You are at a stalemate. You all have fingers on the buttons. You all have famine in your countries. Now the only thing to do is to trust one man to settle the whole thing. All right, I'll settle it." He will be a true anti-Christ figure, because he will have much of the wisdom we know Jesus has. He will exercise that wisdom to arrange international trade and relationships and bring peace to the world. Immediately we will sense, "This is great! This is wonderful! This is the answer to our problem!" Especially as famines, earthquakes, wars will have intensified to the point where they are almost universal. Then this anti-Christ figure will come in. At the beginning he will appear to support and protect Israel. At that time he will persecute those who believe in Jesus and there will be a great tribulation. Some of us who have died will be caught up in a rapture to Jesus. Some of us believe that will take place before the tribulation and some of us believe after it. Having finished with the tribulation of the Gentiles, he will enter into the "time of Jacob's trouble—he will begin to persecute the Jews. He will lead the nations against Israel into the battle of Armageddon, when Jesus will return to earth, and Jesus will give the Jews their homeland. That is what New Testament Christians believe.

A Zionist rejects the New Testament. They do not believe in Jesus and rejects the idea that he is the Messiah. They are not open to the idea that he is the Messiah. They believe that it is their

right and their responsibility to bring about God's will by the strength of their own right arm. This means lobbying in Washington, allegiances with foreign powers, and American money. They believe that they must do it by their own power and ability. Loved ones, that's why Paul says they are enemies of God as regards the gospel. They are trying to bring about what is promised and prophesied would be theirs by their own power, rejecting the Messiah and remaining hostile to his Word.

That's the kind of Jewish heart that Luther says is hard. It's not the hearts of most of our friends. Most of our friends are like us. They are Jewish in background but they have the same heart as we have. There is a small minority, as there is in all places, so don't let's think this is just Jewish. I was brought up in Belfast where there is a strong bitter group of Protestants who are brought up to hate Catholics. So there is this everywhere. What we are saying is the Jewish people are like everybody else. They have this small minority of people who hate and are so determined to get their way that they will reject what others regard as truth--that is Jesus.

That's the attitude they had when Jesus came to earth. Look at John 7:19: "Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keep the law. Why do you seek to kill me?" Now brothers and sisters, I'd just plead with you, you either agree with your Lord or you agree with others. And it is Jesus that said to this small Jewish minority, "Why do you seek to kill me?" You had better be careful before, for the sake of fashionability or popularity you go and say, "Oh, no, they didn't want to kill him." Jesus said, "Why do you seek to kill me?"

I agree with you that the minority is subtle and try to bring the guilt of their action upon everybody else. It is important to see that there was a group of Jews, as there was a group of Romans--and we would probably say a group of Irishmen and a group of Americans—who all in a sense killed Jesus. They also killed Jesus and had hostility towards him. They carried that hostility on. It's in that sense that Paul is saying, "They, in regard to the gospel, in regard to anything concerning Jesus being God's Son or being our Savior, they are enemies of God."

The interesting thing is that he says they are enemies of God "for your sake." You'll see why he says that if you turn to Acts 18. They not only rejected Jesus but they rejected his apostles when they preached that Jesus was God's Son. You find it in Acts 18:5: "When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with preaching, testifying to the Jews that the Christ [the Messiah] was Jesus. And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, 'Your blood be upon your heads! I'm innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'" That's what Paul means. They were enemies of God, enemies of the gospel for our sake; in that when they rejected Jesus the apostles came to us Gentiles. We heard the gospel ourselves but it was because the Jews rejected the gospel that we heard of it. They were enemies of God, but even in their enmity God used them to bring about the opportunities you and I have.

Now there is another part of the verse. "But as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers." The meaning of that is that the one who fathered the Jewish people was Abraham. He was the first man about four thousand years ago who trusted his life to God, the Creator of the world. God spoke to him and told him that he was going to use his descendants to show his faithfulness and love to all people throughout the world. Abraham believed that, and his faith was counted to him for righteousness. He was the first man whose faith was counted as righteousness by God. His descendants became the Jewish people. God still remembers Abraham's trust and faith and for the sake of the fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, God still regards the Jewish people as his dear people, as beloved to him. This is still a truth in rabbinical doctrine throughout the years. These fathers trusted God way at the beginning of the world and the primeval times of our history. God

for their sake still regards the Jewish people as his dear people, as beloved to him.

Even as they reject him, even as they are hostile to him, even as they oppose his body, even as they criticize his Word, God still loves them. He cannot bring them into heaven unless they change their attitude to his Son, but here on earth he is extending continually to them the attitude of Romans 10:21: "But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'" That is God's attitude to the Jewish people. They are beloved for the sake of their forefathers and therefore they have the protection of God, the same protection that he gave the prophets and kings of Israel when he said, "Touch not the Lord's anointed." That's why nobody who loves Jesus can indulge in anything that looks or feels like anti-Semitism. If you love Jesus, you love the people who brought Jesus to earth and you treat them as the Lord's anointed, whatever their attitude.

Loved ones, do you see that that is God's attitude to all of us this morning? He says to you and me, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people." You are alive this morning because God is still loving you. Otherwise, he could pull out the connection between all those molecules in your body and you'd disappear in a moment, but God still loves you. Calvary is God receiving the blows of your sins and mine on his face; he holds up his hand to keep them off, and he puts his other hand out to you to welcome you.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you for your love that keeps on keeping on whatever we do. Thank you, Lord, for Calvary and the picture of a dear God who has power to break us in a moment still holding out a hand to us; to welcome us and using your other hand to shield the blows and lashes we lay upon you with our sarcasm, greed, anger and pettiness, all the sins that we force you to bear every day. Dear Lord, thank you for your condescension which doesn't seem condescension but is sheer humility and above all an incomprehensible love for us. Thank you, Lord.

Thank you for keeping our bodies together, keeping our blood circulating and keeping our minds working, even as we use these gifts of yours to hurt you so often. Lord, we would not have you say to us, "All your life long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people." Lord, we would stop this very day. We are not in the business of kicking the Savior or of walking over a Man's blood who has died for us. We are not in the business of hurting one who has his hand out to us. Lord, we are not that kind of people. We ask you, Father, to forgive us and we would give our lives into your control. You have shown us more than enough love to persuade us. We give ourselves to you, our Father and trust you by beginning to be the people you wanted the dear Jews to be. Lord, that is what we will be to you -- a faithful and trusting people, for Jesus' sake.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship with his Holy Spirit be with each one of us. Amen.