

*Election*  
**The Mystery of Election**  
Romans 11:25-36  
Parker Evangelical Presbyterian Church  
June 5, 2011  
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**Pray.** Have you ever had an experience where you were so overcome with the presence of the Living God, so aware of His presence that you could almost reach out and touch Him, that you just fell down or wanted to fall down on your knees in worship? I have had several such experiences in my life and the one that sticks out above all others happened during my senior year in college. Kristi and I were on a spring break mission trip to inner-city Chicago, to a community called La Vallita which was a Hispanic enclave in the midst of the larger community of Lawndale which was primarily African-American. It was a brutal place to live. Terrible poverty, gang violence, drugs, you name it. The life expectancy for young men in this area was 18-20 years of age. It was a tough place to live. We went there to help with an afterschool program and do some work around the church but the first thing we did when we arrived was attend their church service. I remember sitting there in the sanctuary which was a converted bar and on that particular Sunday they had done a pulpit swap with another predominantly African-American church in town. So we gathered together – black, white, Hispanic – with all of the cultural and social and economic and even language barriers separating us from each other and then the preacher got up to preach. And this guy was your classic black preacher. He was all fire and passion, so full of energy that he literally sweat through his jacket that morning. I remember he even had a personal nurse who obviously traveled with him. She wore a white nurse's uniform and when he finished, she literally towed him off and gave him some kind of Gatorade concoction to drink. It was incredible. Anyway, because he was preaching in a mostly Spanish-speaking congregation, he used an interpreter. And that was working well but then there

came this moment when the Spirit of God started to move powerfully – we all felt it, it was like a living, breathing, holy Presence – and the interpreter literally just sat down and this guy kept on going and I remember looking around and I just knew everyone, I mean everyone in that room, could understand what he was saying. He was speaking English, God became the translator and I just sat there with my mouth hanging open in awe. I wanted to fall on my knees in worship. Ever had an experience like that? Doesn't have to be in a church service although it certainly could be. Could be a time when you are up in the mountains and you come across a beautiful alpine meadow or perhaps on top of a mountain or maybe in a special, intimate moment shared between you and someone you love. Ever have a moment when you come face to face with the majesty and glory of God and you know the only response you can possibly give is worship?

That's what happens to Paul at the end of Romans 11. Turn with me there if you will and let's read this incredible passage. **Lest you be wise in your own sight, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."** As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord,

**or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”  
For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.**

If you've been with us since Easter, you know we've been talking about this issue of election. That is, what does Paul mean when he says that God has elected to save some and not others? And what role do our choices play in all this?

And really you have to go back and look at the whole of Romans to understand how climactic this passage truly is. So let me just give us a flyover of the first eleven chapters just to remind us of where Paul's been so far and how he's gotten to this point. **Overview of Romans.**

You can almost see Paul, can't you? In some room in an inn somewhere, probably around Corinth, writing by candlelight. You can almost see him in mid-sentence lean back and reflect on all that he had witnessed over the past several years on his missionary journeys. He has seen the hand of God. He has witnessed the glory of God. He has also seen the worst this world has to offer. Stoned at Lystra. Beaten with the lash. Shipwrecked. He has suffered hunger and cold and deprivation and yet there remains in him this spark, this flicker of knowledge that keeps him going. He knows what God is up to. He can see it. Salvation! Deliverance! Maybe it struck him like a thunderbolt or maybe it came as a whisper, I don't know. All I know is that there came this moment when Paul suddenly was gripped by the incredible scope of God's plan and so back goes the pen to paper or should I say the quill to the papyrus and he describes it for his Roman brothers and sisters.

I want you to understand, he says, I want you to understand what God is up to here! Yes, it appears as if Israel has rejected God, yes it appears as if their hearts have become hard towards the Gospel but understand that God is using that hardness, that resistance to bring in the Gentiles. To bring deliverance to those who once stood outside his grace. He is using Israel's unbelief to

bring Gentiles to faith but that doesn't mean he has forgotten his people! God still has some kind of plan for the people of Israel. God still plans to save all Israel! Does that mean every single individual Jew will be saved? No, just as the "full number" of Gentiles doesn't mean that every single non-Jew will be saved. But there is this collective, communal sense to salvation. There's this sense that salvation is always a "we" thing rather than an "I" thing. This isn't universalism in the sense that every single person throughout history will be saved. That is not what's being promised here rather it's this sense that our identity is somehow wrapped up with the whole, that we are a part of something larger than ourselves and God is not through with us yet.

For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable, Paul says. God doesn't change. God doesn't lie. God's purposes are never thwarted. His plan never fails. And each one of us is living proof of that. At one time, we were disobedient. At one time, we were far from God. At one time, we were lost. But then God showed us mercy. Something happened in our lives to draw us close to him. Maybe it was a good friend who showed us the way. A mother or a father who faithfully taught us the faith. Or maybe it was a life experience that finally convinced us to stop beating our heads against the wall and surrender to Christ. Whatever it was, it was the mercy of God in action. And we were saved. Are you with me, this morning? Do you understand how high and wide and deep is the love of God for us? Do you understand how much we needed this mercy and grace of God? I'm not sure you do so let me tell you this story to make my point even more clear.

In one of the hearings following the breakdown of Apartheid in South Africa, a South African woman stood listening as white police officers acknowledged the atrocities they had perpetrated in the name of apartheid. Officer van de Broek acknowledged his responsibility in the death of her son. Along with others, he had shot her 18-year-old son at point-blank range. He

had partied while they burned his body, turning it over and over on a fire until it was reduced to ashes. Eight years later, van de Broek arrived to seize her husband. A few hours later, shortly after midnight, van de Broek came to fetch the woman. He took her to a woodpile where her husband lay bound. She was forced to watch as they poured gasoline over his body and ignited the flames. The last words she heard her husband say were "Forgive them." Now, van de Broek stood before her awaiting judgment. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission asked her what she wanted. "I want three things," she said calmly. "I want Mr. van de Broek to take me to the place where they burned my husband's body. I would like to gather up the dust and give him a decent burial. "Second, Mr. van de Broek took all my family away from me, and I still have a lot of love to give. Twice a month, I would like for him to come to the ghetto and spend a day with me so I can be a mother to him. "Third, I would like Mr. van de Broek to know that he is forgiven by God, and that I too forgive him. I would like someone to lead me to where he is seated, so I can embrace him and he can know my forgiveness is real." As the elderly woman was led across the courtroom, van de Broek fainted, overwhelmed. Someone began singing "Amazing Grace." Gradually everyone joined in.<sup>1</sup> I guess so. That's a picture of the grace God offers all of us and even that pales in comparison to God's perfect grace and love. Are you with me here? All of us are officer van de Broek. All of us are guilty of crimes against God that are unfathomable and irredeemable except for the blood of Jesus Christ. God consigned all of us to disobedience, Paul says, so that he may have mercy on all. This is what God is up to and has been up to since before time began! This has been his plan all along!

Now what is the only response we can give to this great and glorious and majestic thing God has done for us? Worship! All we can do is fall on our knees and worship this God! For

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley W. Green, *The Canadian Mennonite* (9-4-00), p. 11.

from him and to him and through him are indeed all things! To him alone belongs the glory! To him alone belongs all praise! That's why we gather here, dear friends. To worship God alone. So check your heart today. Why are you here? Is it because worship makes you happy? Gives you that warm fuzzy? Certainly, happiness and joy will flow from an encounter with the Holy Spirit but not always. Are you here because you feel more fulfilled? Gives purpose to your life? Surely worship does connect us with the main purpose for our lives but that's not why we worship. Maybe you're here because of your family. Because you heard somewhere along the way that the family that worships together stays together. Certainly a true statement but that's not why we worship. Maybe you're here because it makes you feel good. Again, no question a deep sense of security flows from a life grounded in Jesus Christ. But that's not why we worship. We worship God purely because he's God. He's worthy of our worship in and of himself. This isn't about what we get in return. This isn't about our good health or financial success or peace of mind. Worship is about having a face to face encounter with the Living God and being changed in the process. We worship God because God created us to worship Him. Worship is at the center of our lives. It is at the heart of our reason for being. It is why in the Westminster Catechism tells us that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. It's why the Heidelberg Catechism tells us that our only comfort in life and in death is that we belong body and soul not to ourselves but to our faithful savior Jesus Christ. So I ask you this morning...are you here to worship? Are you here to surrender and lay it all down for the majesty and glory of God? If you are...then come to the Table.