

Magnifying Ministry

Romans 11: 13 - 15

- Romans 11 is all about the Jews—ethnic Israel, and what God is doing with them.
 - In verses 1 – 10, we saw how God has been faithful to the promises that He made to Israel through Abraham, their forefather—faithful in spite of Israel's unfaithfulness.
- In Genesis 12: 3, God promised that through Abraham's offspring

Genesis 12: 3 all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

- In hindsight, we can look back and see that from Abraham's offspring would come the Messiah, who would reverse the curse of sin. Even though we often don't realize it, there is no greater blessing for our lives than that.
 - Health, wealth, prosperity don't begin to compare to the blessings that are ours because, through Christ, God has reversed the curse of sin and brought us from death to life.
- God's promises to Abraham haven't failed. God has been at work, throughout Israel's history, preserving and saving a remnant for Himself and His glory—a remnant that would bring forth the promised Messiah—a remnant that the Messiah would commission to plant his church.
- But as we move on through the rest of the chapter, Paul's focus changes. Rather than speaking about a remnant that God is saving, Paul begins to speak about the fullness of Israel being saved. That is, a future restoration of the people of Israel.

Romans 11: 16 - 26 If the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, so is the whole lump, and if the root is holy, so are the branches. ¹⁷ But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, ¹⁸ do not be arrogant toward the branches. If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you. ¹⁹ Then you will say, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." ²⁰ That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. ²¹ For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. ²² Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. ²³ And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree. ²⁵ Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶ And in this way all Israel will be saved.

- Eventually, there will be a full restoration of the people of Israel to the family of God. At present, many are hardened and have turned away from God, but a day is coming when the hardness will melt away and restoration will come.
- There is an olive tree, the root of the tree is the promise of God to redeem a people to himself through the Messiah.



- At first the tree was just Jews, just ethnic Israel. They grew out of the promises that God made to Abraham. It could rightly be said that the cultivated olive tree was a Jewish tree.
- But many of those Jewish branches failed to produce fruit, so those unfruitful branches have been broken off of the tree (think of a pruning). And in their place God has grafted in the Gentiles (the wild olive shoot).
- But that is not the end of the story. Look at verse 23. God's not done with the natural branches that have been cut off. Just as the wild branches were grafted in, these cultivated branches, that have been broken off, can, through God's power, be brought back to life and grafted back onto the tree.
- There is just one tree, rooted in the plan and promises of God, which are all fulfilled in Christ. That tree is the people of God, true Israel, the true church.
 - Growing as part of that tree are natural branches, faithful Jews, like Abraham, Moses, David, and by the way, the disciples, that bear the fruit of faith. Old Testament believers of true faith are natural branches that remain part of the tree. But growing alongside of those natural branches are Gentile branches that God has grafted into the tree.
 - These are people like the Ethiopian Eunuch, of Acts 8, that Philip shared the Gospel with, or the Roman, Cornelius, that Peter shared the Gospel with, in Acts 10, or Lydia and the Philippian jailer that Paul and Silas shared the Gospel with, in Acts 15, or you and me that, years later, also heard the Gospel and received it with joy.
 - But look what else Paul tells us. Alongside the natural Jewish branches, and the grafted in Gentile branches, God will once again graft in some of the broken off Jewish branches restoring them back to the tree. So, in the end, this tree will have many different kinds of branches from all of the families of the earth, fulfilling the promise God made to Abraham that through his offspring all the families of the earth will be blessed.
- Although these branches will come from all of the families of the earth, they will all be part of the same tree—sharing a common root, Christ, and bearing a common fruit, the fruit of the Spirit.

John 15: 5 (Jesus said) "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

- The only way to bear fruit is to be grafted into Christ. Until that happens, we are dead. Being joined to Christ by faith makes us alive and fruitful. If we are grafted into Christ, we will bear fruit.
- Do you see Paul's big point? A day is coming, after the fullness of the Gentiles has been brought to faith in Christ and grafted into the tree, in which, God will graft many of fallen Israel back onto the tree, which in turn will make the tree even more beautiful and more fruitful. That is what Paul was pointing us to in verse 12.

Romans 11: 12 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!



- Israel stumbled, making a way for the Gentiles to be grafted in. That meant spiritual riches for the Gentiles, but how much greater will those riches be when God performs a miracle and grafts fallen Israel back into the tree?
- That is what is going to happen one day, and understanding that, at least in a big picture sense, sets the stage for what Paul writes in verses 13 – 15 of Romans 11, which is what we want to consider today.

Romans 11: 13 – 15 Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry ¹⁴in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. ¹⁵For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?

- Look at how Paul begins this section of verses. First, he makes it clear that he is addressing the Gentiles.
 - This should actually already be clear to even the most casual reader of Romans. Because whenever Paul speaks about the Jews, he doesn't do it in the second person, using pronouns like you or yours, he does it in the third person using pronouns like they. For example:

Romans 9: 4 – 5 They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. ⁵To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever.

- He doesn't say, "to you," as he would if he were writing directly to the Jews, he says, "to them." Even though Paul was a devout Jew, he was called and commissioned by Christ to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Listen to Paul's own testimony of his commissioning by Christ:

Acts 22: 17 – 21 "When I had returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, I fell into a trance ¹⁸and saw him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.' ²¹And he said to me, 'Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"

- And from that moment forward, Paul lived and ministered under that commissioning.

Ephesians 3: 7 – 9 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things.

- As the Apostle to the Gentiles, this is what Paul is doing to the church in Rome. Paul had a hand in planting many churches throughout the Roman Empire, but, interestingly enough, the church in Rome wasn't one of them. In fact, Paul makes it clear in Romans 15 that he had not even had the opportunity to visit the church in Rome when he wrote this letter to them.
- How did the church in Rome get there?
 - It was undoubtedly planted by Jewish Christians who had gone to Rome after the Day of Pentecost. At its inception, the church in Rome was made up only of Jews who had embraced Christ.



- But, in AD 49, the Roman Emperor, Claudius, expelled Jews from Rome for rioting over “Chrestus,” likely a Latinized form of *Christos*, the Greek translation of the Hebrew word, Messiah.
 - Luke refers to this decree in Acts 18:2-4. There, Luke tells us that soon after arriving in Corinth, Paul meets Aquila and Priscilla, Jewish tentmakers who had been forced to leave Rome by Claudius.
- This expulsion of believers in A.D. 49 only effected the Jewish members of the congregation, and the result was, the church in Rome soon had only Gentile converts. So, when Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome, 8 years later, in AD 57, the church would have been primarily Gentile.
- That raises an interesting question, doesn’t it? Why, in a letter written to Gentile Christians, is Paul writing so much about the Jews?
 - Think about it. Chapters 9, 10 and 11 are all about the Jews and what God is doing with them. Why should these Gentile believers care about the Jews? Hadn’t God written them off? Wasn’t God done with them? Why is Paul spending so much ink writing about them?
- The answer is there at the end of verse 13, “I magnify my ministry.”
 1. **What does Paul mean when he says, “I magnify my ministry?”**
- What does it mean to magnify something? It means to make it larger.
 - In our pride, our natural human tendency is to make ourselves larger. Is that what Paul is doing here? He is the apostle to the Gentiles. The Gentiles have been grafted into the tree. Is he bragging about how his work has made more Gentile Christians than Jewish Christians? That he has been more successful than the other apostles?
 - That is one way to think of magnifying ministry, but there is another way. A better way. Think what Paul is doing here. He is discipling, through teaching, Helping these Gentile Christians to grow in their faith.
 - He is not like some modern-day revival preacher who rolls into town and counts up the converts that came to faith through his evangelistic efforts, as if they were notches on his belt, and then goes on to the next town. No, he is engaged in teaching them a deeper understanding of truths they have already embraced.
- Paul was intent on doing what Jesus commissioned all of us to do—go and make disciples of the Gentiles.
 - Disciple-making isn’t just evangelism, it is teaching, and helping people to grow in their faith. It is moving in beside people and living life with them to help them apply the Gospel to their life. That is what Paul did with Priscilla and Aquila in Acts 18.

Acts 18: 1 - 3 After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ²And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade.



• That was how Paul magnified his ministry and made it larger. This is what he is doing in Romans.

- Think about it. Theologically, Romans is the densest, most complex, book of the New Testament. Paul wrote it to a Gentile Church; in a city he had never before visited. Why? To disciple them. To train them in the truths of the Gospel. He probably wrote it because of the conversations he had with Priscilla and Aquila as they sewed tents together.
- Paul didn't just want the church in Rome to be saved. He wanted them to fully understand the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and what it meant.

2. Why does Paul magnify his ministry to the Gentiles?

Romans 11: 14 in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.

- Paul's desire is for the Gentile Church to flourish and be fruitful because he knows that as that happens, it will arouse his fellow Jews to jealousy.
 - In terms of the tree that Paul is going to talk about later in chapter 11, the Gentiles who have been grafted in, need to be fruitful, because their fruitfulness will make the Jews realize what they are missing out on because of their rejection of Christ. And God will use that jealousy to bring them to life and graft them back into the tree.
- Let's take a moment and apply this to our lives. Why would anyone want to be a Christian if our life looks just like theirs? Why have Jesus if Jesus doesn't change anything? If we don't bear fruit, then what is the point of being grafted in?
 - There is a saying you may have heard but it goes like this: If you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Listen to Peter's exhortation along these lines.

1 Peter 2: 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

- Is that happening in our lives? Jesus said:

John 7:38 Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.

- Does that describe us? Are we so filled with the living water and the Spirit of Christ, that the Spirit of Christ flows out of us to the world around us, so that they see our good deeds and glorify God? So, they become jealous of what we have in our lives and desire what we have in Christ for themselves?
- Are we magnifying our ministry to those around us, not just telling others that they need Jesus, but showing them through our lives what having Jesus in our life means for us?
- The whole duty of the Christian can be summed up in this: feel, think, and act in a way that will make Christ look as great as he really is. Be a telescope for the world to look through and see the infinite starry wealth of the glory of the unsearchable riches of Christ.
- We can't magnify what you haven't seen or what we quickly forget. This is why Jesus said to us:

John 15: 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

- Think what Jesus is saying to us. If we are not bearing fruit, if streams of living water are not flowing from our lives, then there is only one reason. It is because we have lost or never had connection with Jesus.
- Do you know when Jesus is most magnified in your life? It is when, by the world's standards, life stinks. It is when your marriage is struggling, your job is going poorly, your health is unhealthy, your financial position is shaky, your children are difficult, your job is at a dead end.
 - The world around you is struggling with all those same things and they are miserable in the struggle. These broken places in your life, let the light of Christ, that is in you, shine out to the world around you.
 - The best way to disciple others isn't to say to them, "Look I have my life all together, be like me." But rather, to say, "I have the same brokenness that you have, but here is how Jesus is bringing joy in the midst of the trials."
 - Paul knew that. In 2 Corinthians 12, he spoke about a thorn in the flesh. Actually, the Greek word Paul uses carries more of the meaning of a stake that has impaled him. He calls this thorn a messenger from Satan. Now think what that means. This thorn, this stake, has been driven into him by Satan to derail Paul from ministry.
 - Paul says that he pleaded with God three times to remove this stake. But his prayers went unanswered. Instead, he heard God say:

2 Corinthians 12: 9 – 10 "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- That's how we magnify ministry. The world needs to see how we handle success, they need to see us give all the praise and glory to God, as good things come to our life. But more importantly the world needs to see the grace and power of Christ, displayed in our lives, as we deal with the same problems they are dealing with. That's what will make others jealous to have Christ in their life. That's what will bring life from the dead.

3. What does it mean for us, when Paul says, "What will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?"

- How do we understand this idea of life from the dead? It would be simple to say that Paul is speaking of a resurrection because in one way he is. In some ways, this verse points to the resurrection to life that will happen when Jesus comes again and gathers all of his own to be with him forever.
- Just stop for a minute and imagine with me the glory stories that we will share in, and through, all of eternity. Indeed, Jesus will get all the glory, and rightfully so, because our salvation, our resurrection to eternal life, starts and ends with him.
 - But we get to share in those glory stories. Christ has commissioned us to go and share the good news of the Gospel. He has commissioned us to magnify

ministry by using us as the means to disciple others. In doing that, he is bringing us into and making us part of the glory story.

- Imagine, in eternity, a person walking up to you and saying, “Jesus saved me because you magnified ministry in my life and shared Jesus with me.” Or, “Jesus saved me, because you magnified ministry by disciplining a person, who disciplined a person, who shared the gospel with me.”
 - Think about it. I am saved because God used a continuous line of people going back to Adam and Eve, to magnify ministry to me. Adam and Eve told their offspring of the promise of God in Genesis 3: 15 that through their offspring would come one who would crush Satan’s head and make salvation possible by reversing the curse of sin. That promise was repeated through countless generations, until it came to me on a summer day in 1964.
 - I am saved because God used a continuous line of people going back to Abraham to magnify ministry, in my life. I am saved because countless generations of the people of God passed on the promise that through Abraham’s offspring all the families of the earth would be blessed. My family is one of those families.
 - I am saved because the disciples, and Paul, magnified ministry, in my life. I don’t know which one or ones it was, but in glory I will. There, I will see the unbroken line of succession tracing back through generations to the early church, and then to the prophets, and then to David, and to Moses, and to Abraham, and yes Adam and Eve.
- Do you see what I am saying? I have been brought from death to life, not just because 60 years ago a counselor at summer camp, magnified ministry by giving up his summer to be at that camp to share the gospel with me. I am saved because God has moved throughout all of history, in the lives of His elect to magnify their ministry, so that one day, I would hear the good news of the Gospel—that Christ has regarded my helpless estate and shed his own blood for my soul.
- And now, God is using us to magnify ministry, so that others, in this generation, and generations to come, can know the hope that is ours in Christ.
 - Think of that. Our gracious God makes us part of the glory story, that will be told throughout eternity, by using us as the means of making the unsearchable riches of Christ known.
- But I don’t think that Paul just has in mind a future resurrection when he speaks of bringing death to life in verse 15. I think Paul is speaking about the riches of the blessings that are ours, even in the moment we are living in, as we share the unsearchable riches of Christ with others.
 - I can’t think of anything that brings more joy than being part of seeing someone who is dead in sin come to life in Christ.
 - In Ezekiel 37, there is a wonderful picture of death to life. I often use this account to describe what it means that we are dead in our sins, but today, let’s use it to illustrate God using us to magnify ministry in a person’s life.

Ezekiel 37: 1 – 10 The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. ³He asked me, “Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “Sovereign Lord, you alone know.” ⁴Then he said to me, “Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!’ ⁵This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. ⁶I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.” ⁷So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. ⁸I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, “Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’” ¹⁰So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army.

- How did God bring those dried out dead bones back to life? Through Ezekiel magnifying ministry, prophesying to the bones. God can do the same through you and me today. It is what God does. He graciously brings us into the glory story, and all we have to do to be part of it is to magnify our ministry—to make Christ known.
- In the context of everything in chapter 11, think what Paul is saying to the Gentiles. Don’t get all puffed up and proud and write the Jews off. Don’t damn them or condemn them because even though they look dead, even though it looks like there is no hope, those dry bones are going to live, because our God brings death to life.
 - I have magnified my ministry so that God could work through that ministry and bring death to life. Now you go and do likewise. You’ve been grafted into the tree, now magnify your ministry, and go and bear fruit, so that others, even the Jews, can be grafted in.
- Do you believe that? I hope you do. Our God brings death to life.
 - Your struggling marriage, your troubles with your children, your finances, your job, your health, are all an opportunity for you to magnify ministry in your life so that others can be brought from death to life.
- Can these dry bones live? Only God knows. But I know this, each of have been commissioned by Jesus to go and prophesy to the dry bones. Wherever God has put you is an opportunity for you to magnify ministry. Let the light of Christ, that is in your life, shine out of the broken places of your life into the brokenness of the world around you.
 - Our God is a faithful God bringing forth life from death. If you don’t know this life, if you see no fruit, if it doesn’t seem like the living water of Christ is bubbling up inside of you come talk to me after the service.
 - And if you have come to know this life of Christ in you, go, magnify ministry, and make Christ known so that others can be raised from death to life.