**A Chain of God’s Blessing**

Romans 11:13-24

Happy Thanksgiving! We’ve learned that God didn’t completely reject the Israelites who refused to receive His Messiah. In fact, the Israelites were not being on a downward spiral, but the spiral was upward. They have not stumbled so as to fall beyond recovery but rather to rise. And in that rise, both to experience and to cause Gentiles to experience, the greater blessings than would have been the case if they had not fallen in the first place. Such is God’s merciful providence.

Verses 11-12 say, “So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fullness bring!” In these verses, we see a chain with three links: 1) Through Israel’s fall, salvation has come to the Gentiles. 2) Gentile salvation will make Israel envious and so lead to her restoration or fullness. 3) Israel’s fullness will bring yet much greater riches to the world. During Paul’s first missionary journey, Paul said to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch, “We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). It happened during his second and third missionary journey. The gospel went to the gentiles. But the gospel went to the Gentiles in order to arouse the envy of the Jews. When the Jews see that the Gentiles enjoy the blessing of salvation, reconciliation with God and with each other, forgiveness upon sins, and love, joy, peace in the Holy Spirit, they would be envious of the blessing. And they would come to Jesus. The third step is that the Israel’s fullness would bring much greater blessing to the world. Their fall and failure became the blessing to the Gentiles and their fullness would bring much greater riches to the world.

So Paul said in verses 13-14, “I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride (glory) in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them.” Paul took God’s call to be the apostle to the Gentiles as his glory for it is not only the blessing to the gentiles but the blessing to his own people. Here, we can think about a jealousy. It is “the desire to have for oneself something possessed by another. Whether it is good or evil depends on the nature of the something desired and on whether one has any right to its possession” (Stott). If you envy someone’s nice car and want to take it, it is sinful. But if you desire a blessing from God, which is for all people, it is not evil at all. So Paul found joy with his ministry to make the Jews envious.

We are Gentile believers. What is our role? It is that we arouse envy of nonbelievers by enjoying the blessing of salvation fully. When we have love, joy, thanks, and peace in the midst of difficulties, people will be envious of our life. This is how we can be aroma of Christ. This is God’s call for us.

Paul said in verse 15, “For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” Here, “life from the dead” is difficult to interpret for we Christians have received the blessing of the resurrection in Christ. Thus, some scholars interpret it figuratively as “unimaginable blessing” – the great revival of the world as the Jews and Gentiles work together for the gospel. Although the Jews rejected God’s Messiah, they have holy root – spiritual heritage. Paul says, “If the part of the dough offered as firstfruits is holy, then the whole batch is holy; if the root is holy, so are the branches” (16). It is true, the Jews has rich heritage. I once heard a Jewish pastor’s preaching. I felt that I was listening to the apostle Paul for he had deep knowledge of the OT and rich Jewish heritage in his message. The potentiality is great when the Jews return to God; an unprecedented quickening for the world in the expansion and success of the gospel would come.

In verses 17-22, Paul gives a warning to the Gentile believers that they should not be proud like the Jews: “If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.’ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in His kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.” (17-21). In this allegory, the olive tree refers to God’s people, its root refers to the patriarchs, branches refers to the children of the Jews. And broken off branches refer to the Jews who fell away in their unbelief. And the wild olive shoot grafted in the olive tree refer to the Gentile believers. In this allegory, we see two key words, “broken off” and “grafted in.” The first words, “broken off” is used to warn the gentile believers: “do not consider yourself to be superior to those other branches” (18). There are four reasons that the Gentile believers should not be proud. *First,* the branches depend on the root. *Second,* they were grafted in because of their faith. *Third,* they should tremble, remembering what had happened to the Jews. *Fourth,* they should not forget God’s sternness toward sinners (22). Paul wanted the Gentile believers to be humble and be a blessing to the world.

Verses 23-24 say, “And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!” In this allegory, we see again a chain of blessing. Natural branches were cut off (Israel’s falling) and the wild olive tree was grafted in (gentiles’ salvation) and the natural branches will be much more easily grafted into their own olive tree (the restoration of the Jews). As Paul realized this salvation work, there was no room for despair. Rather, his heart was filled with greater spirit to preach the gospel. In this hope, he went to Rome and preached the gospel to the very end of his life.

As Gentile Christians, we should be truly humble. Natural branches were cut off in unbelief. We too can fall away. “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!” (1 Cor 10:11-12). We should always stand in faith. Just as God was kind – kind enough to save the gentiles, He wants to save His own people. He is so eager to graft His people back to His tree of salvation. He has unfailing love! Here, we see our role that we should preach the gospel diligently. We participate in the chain of God’s blessing; the gentiles and the Jews come to God’s kingdom and do His work together in the greater riches.