

“Has God Rejected Israel?”

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Series: *Romans*

Bible Text: Romans 11:1-10

Preached on: February 22, 2026

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It's no mystery, I've got a little bit of a little brother still inside of me, that's kind of how I interact with folks, and in particular kids. I love kids, and I love to tease them, which is cruel, but that's what I love to do. I love pranks, I love teasing them, so we were meeting with a couple of weeks ago, my wife and I were in their house, and one of their kids came into the room, and so on the spot I said, hey, I need some help with my sermon, I'm getting ready to preach this sermon from the book of Romans, and I need to know if God has rejected his people Israel, okay? And I know, I'm prone to exaggeration, I'm prone to, I kid you not, you can ask my wife, this is what she said, okay? She said, Paul said, not all Israel is Israel, and that he hardened some of their hearts because they rejected him. She's six, and she's now mentoring me, so that's good for you all, it's gonna be okay.

All joking aside, that is the central question of the text today, and honestly, that is the answer. I mean, I could just close in prayer at this point, like she got it, right? That's essentially the answer. Throughout Paul's entire letter to the Romans, he has repeatedly come back to this question, and throughout history, the world and all of us seem to keep coming back to it, too. We're pretty fascinated with Israel, aren't we? Today Paul gets right to the point. After laying out all the arguments throughout this letter, leading up to this point, right? About sin, about guilt, about justification, about election, Paul returns to this question that is on many of his readers' minds, including our own. Okay, we get it, but what about Israel?

God's chosen people, has God rejected them?

So, we'll begin here, Romans 11:1-10. Paul writes,

1 I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

2 God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel?

3 “Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life.”

4 But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

5 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

7 What then? Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened,

8 as it is written, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day."

9 And David says, "Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a retribution for them;

10 let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see, and bend their backs forever."

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Heavenly Father, we come to you this morning. This is a very, very difficult text, Lord, as so many of them have been in this series, Lord, and we pray as your servants, Lord, would you enable us to be faithful today, to hear from you, Lord, that your message for your people, not just for knowledge sake, Lord, to edify us, to strengthen the church, Lord, to focus our eyes on you, especially in a text like this, Lord, as we always pray, if there's anything that I say today that is not true, anything at all that is false, Father, would you just let it fall away to be forgotten? Father, whatever is true, your word for us through the power of your spirit today, Lord, that it would move from our heads to our hearts, that it would plant roots there, Lord, that it would begin to transform us, Lord, that the work that you began in each one of your believers, Father, would continue, that through this text we would see your Son Jesus Christ high and lifted up in our midst today, that we would be a people who would look more like him than when we first walked through these doors. Send us out with the good news on our lips, in Jesus' name, amen.

Many of you might have heard the news, if you didn't, last month. In Jackson, Mississippi, there was a 19-year-old man named Stephen Pittman, and he broke into a synagogue there, Beth Israel Synagogue, with a gas can and a lighter, and he set it on fire. And as he did so, he sent a text, a number of texts, to his father. He said he was burning it down because of its Jewish ties, and he referred to the synagogue as a temple of Satan. What really caught many people's attention is that when he went to trial, finally, in the last week, everybody recognized that on his social media accounts, he identified himself as a follower of Christ. And when all of his charges were read to him in front of the courthouse that day, his only response was, as he stood, Jesus Christ is Lord. So, you don't need to know much about human history to know that stories like this are nothing new for the Jewish people. In fact, this very same synagogue, Beth Israel Synagogue, was bombed 60 years ago, almost to the day, by members of the Ku Klux Klan.

The Jewish people have been scapegoats countless of times for world leaders that were trying to power grab. In our own day, they continue to be the main characters in nearly every single conspiracy theory under the sun, don't they? Both loyalty to Israel, its rejection, have been part of the Christian discourse ever since Pentecost. What about Israel? What about Israel? And there

is truly nothing new under the sun. Paul's question is constantly relevant to every single generation. It's as relevant as it was to the people reading Romans as it is to us today. And just think about it, right? As we read the account of the scriptures from beginning to end, this is a constant question on our minds, right? From the Egyptians to the Assyrians, to the Babylonians, to the Romans, to the Germans, the people have experienced an almost never-ending saga of defeat and slavery, oppression, attempted genocide. That's the story again and again and again from the very beginning. And we, like our first audience of Romans, we want to know, God, is this evidence of the fact that you've rejected your people? And every generation seems to come to that same question.

What does this mean for Israel?

And so Paul gives us two answers today, which are our two points to hear today. Essentially, number one, no, he has not rejected his people. The second part of it, Israel has rejected God, essentially what he's going to get to, and we'll talk through those things. But first, Paul points to himself. So, the first point.

No, absolutely not

God has in no way, shape, or form rejected his people. This is Paul's unambiguous answer, by no means, he said. And in the original language, he couldn't have used any language that would have been stronger than that. Especially in the Greek, it says, let it not be. In other words, don't even have to ask the question. Under no circumstances, in no way, shape, or form, absolutely not. Not at all. It's emphatic.

And the reason he's able to be so bold is really simple. It's his own testimony, right? There's nothing clever about this argument. We don't have to do a ton of research. You don't have to know a whole lot of biblical history to understand what Paul is saying here. In fact, it's almost like this. It's almost like he's saying, I can't believe that you guys are asking me this question because you know me, right? I am an Israelite. And he didn't reject me. Paul reminds us in verse one, he says, he's a descendant of Abraham, right? He's like giving us his resume in case you forgot who I am. First and foremost, I'm a descendant of Abraham. And he writes, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. Paul writes about his backstory. He writes about it in almost every single letter that he writes. He reminds his readers of his lineage, of his origin story, but if you don't know, Paul was a Pharisee. I mean, he says like, honestly, one of the best. If there ever was a faithful Jew, a faithful Israelite, it was me, okay? Not only from Abraham, but from Benjamin and all the way down, and he became a Pharisee, one of the rulers in the synagogue. And he was doing everything right, checking off the boxes, and his zeal for God, his passion for the Jewish religion was so great that when this new movement started of people calling themselves the Way, these Christ followers, he was enraged, and he went from town to town with a handful of other Pharisees and began to arrest these people and execute them. He took part of all that. He's saying, my bona fides are there. You're not going to find somebody who's more passionate about Judaism than me, he says. And yet, on the road to Damascus, I met Christ face to face, the one who I was ultimately persecuting, and I am a Christian.

And while Paul's own conversion would be sufficient to make the case, he continues, and he gives us this explanation of what we often refer to now as remnant theology. You can write that down. It's important. It's a real huge theme throughout all of redemptive history.

Remnant theology.

He says, do you not know what the scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left and they seek my life. But what is God's reply to him? I have kept for myself 7,000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. And so if you don't know, Paul was quoting a very, at the time at least, would have been a very familiar story, comes all the way back from first Kings all the way in the Old Testament where this prophet Elijah, a man of God, is going up against a people who worship a false God called Baal. And in arguments with him, he says, you know what, let's just set up a test. Let's do a grand experiment. Let's build a huge altar, right? And you call on your God, you call on Baal to come and consume it with fire, and I'll call on mine, and we'll see which one is the real God. Of course, if you know the story, the people of Baal, they cry out, they cry out, they cut themselves, all these things. And then Paul says, you know what, bring in the water, bring in the water. He douses everything with water, and then he calls on Yahweh, and the whole thing is consumed. And afterwards, Elijah goes and he murders all the prophets of Baal.

But it's an interesting story because in the very next scene then, he is fled. Even though he's victorious, he has fled, and he hides in a cave, and there in that place is where he cries out to God. He's saying, look, I've done all this, but look, I'm all alone. I'm the only guy who's being faithful to you. And God responds to him; I have kept for myself 7,000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal. So God is correcting Elijah's hyperbole, his exaggeration, and Paul is doing the same.

When the question comes to Paul, has God rejected all of Israel? Paul says, no, absolutely not, first, because look at me, but secondly, God always saves a remnant, always. And if that sounds unfair or unjust, let me just remind you, this is not a bait and switch on behalf of God, right? This is in his character. This has been the story from the very, very beginning. This is how God has enacted redemptive history from the very, very beginning. Christianity is not a universalist religion. It's not. Everybody doesn't get saved. It has never been that way from the very beginning. Our God is not a universalist God.

So at the very beginning of scripture, let's go all the way back, there's just one family, Adam and Eve, they give birth to their two sons, Cain and Abel. And we are told in the scripture, God blesses Abel, and he curses Cain. That's the very first family. Right from the very beginning, God is making it clear.

In the story of Noah, one family, one family against the whole earth is rescued. One family is chosen to go into the ark, and the rest of the world is flooded.

God chooses to reveal himself out of all the people groups of the world. He comes to one man, Abraham, and blesses his people.

When Abraham has two sons, God chooses to bless Isaac, not Ishmael.

Isaac has children. God blesses Jacob, not Esau.

Jacob has sons. God chooses Joseph.

God rescues Israel from slavery in Egypt, but only a portion of it is even still alive to actually enter into the promised land later.

David has chosen as king over his other brothers.

And at every turn, God chooses very specifically who his blessings will fall on, always. And this is how election works, and this is not a sermon about election, but man, you just go back. We have been talking about this. Paul has been talking about this. From the very beginning, God is the one who saves, from beginning to end. It is a work of grace, and Paul even highlights that again here. It is grace. It is not our works. It's not dependent on you. It's not dependent on me. It is God who reaches down into human history and plucks out and rescues who he's going to rescue. It's always been the way it is.

I had a hermeneutics professor in seminary refer to it as the red line running through scripture. He was saying if you could sort of map it out, right, from the very, very beginning, starting with Adam, with Abel, and then all the way down, you would see this very definitive path of God throughout all of redemptive history, with all the twists and all the turns. God marking out his people in every single generation, this remnant, until it all concentrates into this one moment in time, in a stable outside of Bethlehem over 2,000 years ago, where Jesus Christ is born. That's the centerpiece. That's where all of this was leading to, and so hearing that, I want you to listen again to Paul's words to the Church of Ephesus, when he writes,

Ephesians 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world. In love, he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.

In Christ, by Christ, through Christ, we become the remnant that God has rescued. That has always been God's plan from the very beginning. Jesus Christ is not plan B. And this is what Paul means when he says, so too, at the present time, there is a remnant of Israel, chosen by grace, but if it's by grace, it's no longer on the basis of works. Otherwise, grace would no longer be grace.

And so Paul's answer to the question, did God reject his people, is absolutely not. Because salvation has never come from anyone's ethnicity. In Galatians, he says boldly, in Christ, *in Christ Jesus now, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female. (Galatians 3:28)*

And this is just a reiteration of things. Paul's already said in this letter, things we have already covered, things that we've already preached and taught about, that not all Israel is Israel. He can't make that more clear. He has already said it. You don't have to agree with him, but you're disagreeing with the word of God. Not me. Okay. That's Paul's word. Not all of Israel is Israel. That God is raising up a people. And from the very, very beginning, Old Testament, New Testament, anyone who is part of the people of God, it is in and through Jesus Christ. That's the only basis.

In fact, the only contribution that we make is our sinfulness. That's our side of the equation. That's what we bring to the table. Black, white, brown, American, Asian, European, African, rich, poor, man, woman, Jew, Gentile, all those distinguishing markers that our culture wants to accentuate, wants to use against us, to pit us against one another, to bring division. God says all those markers are erased at the foot of the cross. Anyone who calls on the name of Christ now becomes my adopted child, part of the remnant I am rescuing.

To bring Paul's argument into the modern age, scholars and missiologists agree that there is currently an estimated 330,000 Jews living in the world today who have bowed in need of Jesus and identify as Christians. It's not a small amount, folks.

Has God rejected Israel? Absolutely not, Paul says. He has been rescuing them for millennia, continues to rescue them today. But again, the question, all of them? It's the second part of his answer. All of them? No, because of Israel's rejection of God. And answering the question, did God reject Israel, Paul says

the elect obtain it, but the rest were hardened. As it is written, God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes that would not see, ears that would not hear down to this very day. And David says, let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block, a retribution for them. Let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see and bend their backs forever.

In other words, Paul's response to his audience is not only did God not reject his people, evidenced by saving Paul, always rescuing a remnant. But the second part, a little bit harder to swallow.

Not all of Israel wanted to be saved.

God pursued them and they turned their backs. God rescued them again and again and again from every single oppressor and again and again and again they rejected him. They took his patience for granted. Chased after other gods. It's in that Old Testament reading that Hovie read earlier from passage in Jeremiah. It continues on. You could read it on your own. I'm going to take out just another portion of it because it highlights it. This is during their own captivity and

Jeremiah sent as a prophet to speak against the people of Israel. Here's what God has against you. This is what got you into this trouble in the first place. This is why you're being carried off into captivity. And God through the prophet Jeremiah says pointedly to his people, Israel,

Jeremiah 5:7-9 how can I pardon you? How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken me. You've sworn by those who are not gods. When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery, trooped to the houses of whores. They were well fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for his neighbor's wife. Shall I not punish them for these things declares the Lord? Shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this?

God uses the language in the metaphor of marriage again and again from beginning to end. Some have said that is one way to understand all of redemptive history is to grab a hold of what God does from the garden all the way to the book of Revelation through the metaphor of marriage. It's not a cold and personal God that we worship friends. It's not a God of Greek mythology who's simply destroying anyone who won't stroke his ego. It is deeply, deeply personal. God says, I fed them to the full. They didn't want, they didn't need anything. I provided everything for them. They weren't hungry. They weren't in need. And how did they respond to their faithful lover, he says. They committed adultery and they ran off to the house of whores. They lusted after their neighbor's wife, and their children made vows to other gods and they led them.

You know how Jeremiah responds? He says, you're right. You're absolutely right, God. He says, you have struck them down, but they felt no anguish. You have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock. They have refused to repent. That's the response.

You know, let me ask you a question, something we talk about quite a bit in the, in the counseling center. You don't have to answer out loud, obviously, but do you know, do you know how many times if someone is being abused in a home, especially a spouse, how many times they will leave and seek help before they finally leave for good? Seven times, seven different times of getting to the point of being so beaten down physically, emotionally, verbally, whatever it is that they finally leave the house, they finally run, they finally tell somebody, and yet they will keep going back. Seven different times is the national average. Times of being scared, abused, beaten before they leave for good.

And I think there is something about that statistic that sounds incredibly wrong to us, right? There is a lack of justice there. And as I was thinking about it, I just thought, where do we think that comes from? Why do we respond that way to that? Why do we cry out? Why do we say in not just that circumstance, but a thousand different others every single day, we demand justice, right? We say, that's not right. That is fundamentally broken. That's not the way it should be. There's something might even be inside you say, I want to be a part of that solution. That should not be happening anymore. And it could be that issue or a million different others that every single day we are almost literally in the streets crying about another act of injustice. And so where do you think that comes from? As people made in the image of God, and do you not think

that God sees things the same exact way? I mean, that is a part of the image of God to love what he loves, to hate what he hates, but you see it in the same exact way. As people made in the image of God, you inherently understand there is something broken about someone being abused and running right back into the arms of their abuser. Not once, not twice, but seven different times before they finally get free.

And yet I would say this, when we come to passages about people suffering the consequences of their own actions, so often we want to turn and shake our fingers at God, don't we? We treat him like he's some cruel monster. Friends if we, broken, sinful, rebellious, manipulative, selfish individuals recognize at times how essential it is for people to experience the full weight, and not just experience it, but we cry out for it, we recognize it as a good thing. For people to be exposed, for people to feel at times, to experience the weight and penalty of their own actions. How much more a holy God who has no shadow, no imperfection, no blemish, no impurity. At every time we cry justice, we condemn God whenever he demands it. That's inconsistent, folks.

To be totally honest, I treated God for so many years of my life like he was a joke. Maybe some of you have as well. Like he was a loser, like I took everything that he gave me, everything that he gave me, I spent it on idols. I gave lip service to Jesus, I mocked him behind his back, in my life and in my words. I wanted my baptism and I wanted my beer; that's the way I describe it. I wanted communion and I wanted anything else in the world that would feed my flesh, make me numb and make me forget for a moment that my life was accountable to anybody else but me. I did that for years. One night I heard a preacher in an auditorium, I was outside of Ocean City, New Jersey and I met Jesus face to face. As I bowed my head to pray, I heard two things clear as day, and I don't say that lightly, if you've been around here very long, I'm not a big fan of people telling me that they heard God tell them something. This is the one time in my life that I say it, and I say it to this day. And in that moment of prayer, I heard two things, Steve, you've already prayed this prayer a thousand times, and most importantly, number two, you will not always have the opportunity. You will not always have the opportunity.

Friends, our God is a very patient God, but the scriptures never say that His patience is infinite. I know when we look at passages like today, our temptation is to overlook the grace, and we see in the remnant that He would save some and we rush right away and we question His mercy, we question His goodness, like why does God harden people's heart? How can they cry out to God? It's not their fault. That's what we want to run to, and we dismiss His kindness towards some and immediately demand answers about those He has hardened. That is our human nature.

And to be honest, as I spent time this week, more and more, I have begun to struggle with people who struggle with that. I have begun to struggle with people who struggle with that, because I can only assume that you must have lived a particularly charmed life, that maybe you have never seen the darkness of this world, that you haven't known addiction or abuse or betrayal or abandonment. Maybe you haven't heard about the hundreds of different ways humanity has discovered to hurt children.

So, when people ask me how a loving God could ever send people to hell, I would like to tell them that I can give them a little over 8 billion different answers. It is us, friends. Open your eyes. Do you not see our unspeakable capacity for evil, for hatred, for war, for racism, for greed, our uncontrollable appetites for sex and money, violence, in our relationships, our families, our politics? It is infected, people. It is infected all the way to the bottom. We don't just talk about sin. We talk about total depravity. It means the world was fallen, all of it, every single one of us, all the way to the bottom, every tribe, nation, and tongue, and friends, do you not see it in your own heart? Do you not? How every impulse you and I have is to seat ourselves on the throne of our lives, and we don't want to bow our knee to anyone.

Friends, the great mystery of the Christian faith is not how God could ever reject any of us, but why he would be willing to save any of us.

That's what Paul is trying to get across. And if somehow that brings about arrogance or that brings up even more questions about election or whatever it might be, I just don't want you to miss that point. No matter what else Paul is trying to tell us here, he's saying, isn't it incredible? Isn't it unbelievable? Look in your own heart. Look at the world we live in. Why, if you were the creator, would you take anybody out of this and bring them home? Why would you take any of us and renew our hearts? Why would you give any of us infinite chances to continue to fall at your feet and receive your mercy? As we said in the perseverance of the saints today, not just now, but for all of eternity, why would you glorify us? Why would you bring us to yourself? There's no place for arrogance in that. Nothing but worship. That's where it leaves us.

Paul says it. Don't miss it. There is a remnant chosen by grace, not chosen because of their ethnicity, not chosen because of their status or their good behavior, not chosen because of their grades, their abilities, not because of their gender or the color of their skin, not chosen because of their beauty or their intellect or the country they happen to be born in.

There is a remnant chosen by grace, and that grace, Paul reminds us, is only available by way of Jesus, not the Torah, not Muhammad, not Buddha, not your political party, not the thousands of strangers you're performing for on social media. Our God is a covenant keeper. He has made His Son the only way to receive it, the only way to enter in, the only door, the only path, the only name under heaven through which people can be saved, and He promises they will, they will. All of them? No. Our God is not a universalist God, but from every tribe, nation, and tongue, a remnant is being rescued.

You know, right now, throughout church history, we are in a season that some refer to as Lent. This is the 40 days leading up to Easter. We don't put a lot of emphasis on that here, but it is true, and it's happening, and it's been a time of deep personal reflection, taking stock of where you are right now, your inner thoughts, your broken affections, your idols. It's the process of preparing our hearts to truly grasp our need to be rescued, to see and feel the weight of our sin and the cost of Christ's death. The goal of this exercise is not just morbid introspection, friends. It's not what today is about at all, but to help us experience the full glory of the resurrection when sin and the final enemy, death, are conquered once and for all.

So I invite you to do that work this month, because when this penny drops for you, friends, the full weight of the mercy of God towards those who have rebelled against them, and that God has not turned His back on the world, but is actively rescuing people from the wages of their own sin, not just saving them, but adopting them, adopting them into His family, confirming to them the image of our older brother Christ, who is reconciling all things to Himself. That He's going to rescue you from your sin, your failures, your regrets.

It's an unspeakable mercy that you are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God's infinite light by grace.

What can that look like in the life of a person?

I'll share just one story in conclusion. A young man named Aaron Abrahamson, a Jewish kid living in Seattle. At age 15, his parents, his Jewish parents, moved their family to the promised land to go live in Israel. And while his parents were serious about their faith, Aaron was not. And so in 1992, out of obligation to his country, he joined the Israeli military. He served for years on the front line. There were almost daily clashes. He saw so much violence, so much hatred, and hatred began to grow in his own heart towards the Muslims they were fighting. And eventually, his best friend was kidnapped, tortured, and executed by a member of Hamas, the Muslim terrorist group. In that period of his life, Aaron slipped into nihilism and disillusionment, believing that what he said, quote, religion is for the weak, it's a crutch for people who cannot face life on their own, an illusion. And in his depression, spoke with one person, finally gave him a copy of the Bible and said, hey, I know you were born and raised Jewish. Have you ever read the New Testament? He confessed he hadn't. And this is what he said after he read it. The parables of Jesus pierced through my hardened heart. The story of the prodigal son mirrored my own. The lost sheep reflected my sense of isolation. The climax of Jesus's ministry, his sacrificial death on the cross, shocked me with its depth of love. An innocent Jewish man tortured and killed, praying for the forgiveness of his executioners, showed me what divine mercy truly looks like. And as if this experience were not enough, he finally got the courage to step into the first time he walked in and he didn't understand anything anybody was saying because they were speaking Arabic because what he had walked into was a church full of Muslim converts to Christianity.

He said, when I wandered far from God, God sent me, met me on the road, welcomed me home. That's the same invitation he extends to every Jewish person, to every Arab and to every nation, come home to the Father through the Messiah.

If you heard this message today, the invitation is yours as well. We never assume that every person here is already a follower of Jesus Christ. If you long to come home, if you hear this message today and you sense something inside of you today that is saying, yeah, that's exactly what I want. I want to come home. And that there is a tug on my own heart today that this gospel of good news that I've never heard before, I want it to be my story as well. My plea is to

just surrender. Don't let another day go by. As Christ said to me, you will not always have the opportunity.

If you're here and you know your life has been ransomed by Christ, would you also see the friends and the neighbors, coworkers, family members who's still living on the outside that God has surrounded you with? Will you move towards them with the same grace and mercy by which Christ has moved towards you? I'll say for the other group here, that if you're here today and you've already received his gift of grace, you are his child, but you know that you have taken it for granted. You confuse God's kindness and patience with his permission to live however you please. We've done it once, but you're going to continue to do it. Would you confess that? Would you confess it? Repent and come home again. Paul asked the question, has God rejected Israel? Absolutely not. He says, he has chosen his son and no matter who you are, whoever calls on his name will be saved. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for the beauty of your word. A gift to us, Father, that we do not have to push our hands out into the darkness and walk around and stumble in confusion, but you have made it clear, even the difficult things, Lord. As we wrestle with this today, Father, would we not be distracted? That would we focus our attention on the God who continues to say from the very beginning has been a God who has been giving of himself even to the point of sending his son that he might rescue a people for himself, Lord. Father, we ask that by your mercy and by your grace, Lord, we too would in turn live that reality, that you are the God who is sending, the God who is sacrificing, Lord, and us too, we are now the sent ones, Father. That we have the good news, Lord, that for the sick we've got the cure. Father, would you give us boldness? Would you help us to remember again today, Lord, at the levels of our affections, Father, great hope, excitement, joy, and absolute awe that you would reach down into this dark world and rescue us. We pray that in Christ's name. Amen.