

Never Rejected

Romans 10:18-11:6 (NIV)

¹⁸ But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." ¹⁹ Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding." ²⁰ And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." ²¹ But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." ¹ I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. ² God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: ³ "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? ⁴ And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." ⁵ So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

When do you reject someone? I know. That's a hard hitting question to start off the sermon, but when do you reject someone? When do you say that you are done with them? Is it caused by a series of events leaving you with no option but to get rid of this person and stay away from them? Do you reject friends and no longer see them because you know that they are a bad influence on you, that they encourage you to do things that you know you shouldn't? Do you reject them once you realize that this person is toxic to your life, that every time you talk to them it's either a pity party or they tell you all the things going wrong with their lives with no room for reprieve or for any good news to shine through? Do you reject the family member who is always criticizing, always telling you how you should do things, always throwing little jabs to the face of your life? Do you reject someone once they have said something that you adamantly disagree with? How about when they try to pedal misinformation and personal bias as truth? Do you outright reject someone simply based upon their looks or the color of skin, their age, their religion?

What about God? When do you reject God? There was a very specific point when the Jews in Nazareth rejected Jesus. It wasn't immediately after he said that he was the fulfillment of Isaiah 61. "All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips." (Luke 4:22) But then they realized that Jesus was not some great rabbi or an expert in the law of God who said this, but this was the son of Joseph, the carpenter, the blue collar worker. He was not royalty. He was not from some prestigious family in the community. He was a person just like they were. They had seen him grow up. He was a boy like any other in the neighborhood. He can't be the one who was anointed by the Holy Spirit to release people from captivity.

Jesus knew what they were looking for. They wanted him to prove himself as someone extraordinary by doing some miracles like he had done in Capernaum, how he had turned water into wine and healed people. He hadn't done these things in Nazareth. They wanted him to do them now. Jesus called them out on it. He was not there to impress the people from his hometown. He was here for Jews and Gentiles alike, just as Elijah and Elisha were as they did miracles for non-Jews during their ministry. God's Anointed was not here so that they would have a spectacle to be entertained with. He was not here to establish an earthly kingdom. The Anointed One would seek and save all the lost wherever and whoever they might be.

This was not acceptable to the Jews. In fact, it made them furious! They drove Jesus out of town and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built. They were getting ready to push him off to his death! The Jews violently rejected Jesus on the fact that he, a local boy who had done seemingly nothing special, was now claiming to be the Lord's Anointed. They rejected him because Jesus made it clear that he did not fit their preconceived notions that he would establish earthly dominance of the Jewish people.

What would it take for you to reject God? The list of reasons to reject God is as long as is the day. Some people accept God, believe in him, up until the moment when they hear something that they don't agree with. If God would condemn someone to hell, then I don't want to believe in that kind of a God. They believe until tragedy strikes. Health gets worse. The procedure that was supposed to return someone back to full health didn't work. Now the pain has no solution, and you have to live with it. So, God, I have no use for you. Others believe in God until horrible things are done to them. When they see the pain and suffering in this world, in their own lives, it's time to reject God because obviously he is not guarding and protecting me like he said he would. Some may outright dismiss God because this idea of all powerful supreme being who is in control of all things and made all things does not fit with their worldview. For others, it's a long road of heartache before they finally despair and give up. People give up on God because in one way, shape, or form, he does not meet our expectations.

Although the Jews were unsuccessful that day in Nazareth in killing Jesus, that didn't stop them from plotting and planning. They finally accomplished the ultimate rejection of Jesus on that fateful day in Jerusalem. The crowds' vehemence overpowered Pontius Pilate's judgment that Jesus was innocent. They had him crucified, rejected him as their Savior and instead treated him like the most horrible of criminals.

Yet, how did God react to the Jews' ultimate rejection of him? Did he cast them aside forever? Some thought so, but Paul set the record straight. "God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew." (Romans 11:2) He hadn't abandoned Elijah in his day when there was a bounty on his head and he thought he was the only believer left in Israel. God personally came to Elijah and revealed to him that he had not rejected the Jews, but he had, in fact, reserved 7000 who still believed in him. So God sent Elijah back to Israel to strengthen his people and keep them focused on the Anointed One who would save them as well as the Gentiles.

The Jews had rejected God, but, to the very people who had rejected him, God says through Isaiah, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." (Romans 10:21) He stood there with his arms wide open ready to welcome them back in spite of their rejection of him.

Have you ever had an awkward moment when you have held your arms open for a hug and not received it? When grandma or grandpa come to town to see their grandkids or aunts and uncles come to see their nieces and nephews, how long after they get in the front door do they hold their arms out for a hug if the kids don't come running immediately to them? The kids may not come running because they don't know Grandma and Grandpa, their aunts or uncles that well. The kids don't think that they should embrace them. As grandparents or aunts and uncles continue holding out their arms, Mom and Dad encourage the little ones to go to them. When the kids still don't move, maybe small bribes are offered. Maybe a present is held out for them. Maybe a stern voice begins telling them that they have to go and give them a hug. Now the arms are getting tired. They don't want the kids to feel obligated to give them a hug. You have so much love to give them, but the kids, in this way, reject that love. The arms have been up too long. It's getting embarrassing. You look foolish. The arms finally go down.

That's not how God operates. He never puts his arms down, his hands down, for you or for me. It doesn't matter how long you shy away, how long you hide behind someone else, how long you reject him and his love freely offered to you, he keeps holding his hands out all day long – even to the point of absurdity. When all other people would put their arms down, God does not. Even if it's embarrassing for him to continue to hold out his hands to you as you grow from being a child to a teenager to an adult to a retiree, he does not reject us. He does not lower his hands or take away his love from us. Why? Because that's what grace is. It's a love that continues to be available, continually is offered to you even if you keep rejecting it. God does not hold his hands out all day long because you are so great and so awesome, but because it is his love freely given that motivates him to do so. God's grace keeps him from rejecting us and instead continually seeks to embrace us no matter what we have done to him.

For those who think that God has rejected them, he wants you to see that his hands are held out, even if you have to see him embracing other people instead of you. He says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding...I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." (Romans 10:19-20) He wants you to see that no matter what they have done, no matter how many times they have rejected him, he still holds his hands out to embrace them. He wants you to see this so that you understand that it's never too late. If God kept holding out his hands for those people, then he is certainly holding them out for me as well.

God reveals himself to us today as a God who does not reject us. His grace, his undeserved love for us, compels him to keep holding his hands out for us for a second chance, a third chance, another chance. As long as you are alive, God is holding out his hands for you, even while you may be disobedient and obstinate and reject his saving love. It doesn't matter where you came from, what you did, by grace God holds his hands out to you to the point of embarrassment. He does not reject us, but all day long he holds out his hands to reserve you for himself, to be a part of the remnant chosen by grace, saved forever. Amen.