

Restoring Vitality

11.9.25

Message 42

Romans Series

Romans 11:13–32 (CSB)

¹³ Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Insofar as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, ¹⁴ if I might somehow make my own people jealous and save some of them. ¹⁵ For if their rejection brings reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? ¹⁶ Now if the firstfruits are holy, so is the whole batch. And if the root is holy, so are the branches.

¹⁷ Now if some of the branches were broken off, and you, though a wild olive branch, were grafted in among them and have come to share in the rich root of the cultivated olive tree, ¹⁸ do not boast that you are better than those branches. But if you do boast—you do not sustain the root, but the root sustains you. ¹⁹ Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” ²⁰ True enough; they were broken off because of unbelief, but you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but beware, ²¹ because if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. ²² Therefore, consider God’s kindness and severity: severity toward those who have fallen but God’s kindness toward you—if you remain in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. ²³ And even they, if they do not remain in unbelief, will be grafted in, because God has the power to graft them in again. ²⁴ For if you were cut off from your native wild olive tree and against nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these—the natural branches—be grafted into their own olive tree?

²⁵ I don’t want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you will not be conceited: 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, as it is written,

The Deliverer will come from Zion;

he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.

²⁷ And this will be my covenant with them

when I take away their sins.

²⁸ Regarding the gospel, they are enemies for your advantage, but regarding election, they are loved because of the patriarchs, ²⁹ since God's gracious gifts and calling are irrevocable. ³⁰ As you once disobeyed God but now have received mercy through their disobedience, ³¹ so they too have now disobeyed, resulting in mercy to you, so that they also may now receive mercy. ³² For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may have mercy on all.

Do you like Olives?

A. Some like black and not green.

1. Some like olives on pizza, but don't want them by themselves.
2. Some weirdos eat them straight from the jar.
3. I keep hearing that my tastes will change as I get older.
 - a. I think some of you are praying in your prayer time that I will someday like mustard.
 - b. But our tastes do change.

B. God doesn't change.

1. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Heb. 13:8
2. And Paul is communicating this beautiful truth that God doesn't change by showing us God's dealings with Israel and the Gentiles.
3. God has not changed.
4. The plans God put in place before the creation of the world are still being worked out.
5. That means that God has not thrown away the descendants of Abraham

C. Before Paul changes his focus in Romans 12, he uses one more illustration.

1. It's a picture of an olive tree.
2. A lot is happening to this tree.
3. But what is happening is a great illustration of God's active involvement in the redemption of humanity.
4. Jews and Gentiles, faithful and unfaithful, are all represented here.

The Big Picture

A. Paul describes the tree in its perfect form. Verse 16.

1. Paul mixes illustrations here.

Romans 11:16 (CSB)

¹⁶ Now if the firstfruits are holy, so is the whole batch. And if the root is holy, so are the branches.

Romans 11:16 (NLT)

¹⁶ And since Abraham and the other patriarchs were holy, their descendants will also be holy—just as the entire batch of dough is holy because the portion given as an offering is holy. For if the roots of the tree are holy, the branches will be, too.

a. When Jews in Paul's time prepared their daily bread for cooking, they set aside a small piece of dough as an offering to God and believed that God sanctified the rest of the dough and blessed their house.¹

b. First, this is a crazy idea!

c. Essentially, tithing on your food by setting a bit of flour or dough to the side.

d. Can you picture this:

1. You are preparing your family's bread for the morning.
2. The dough is made and you put some off to the side.
3. Husband walks in to taste some of the batter and you smack his hand: that's the Lord's.
4. The oldest child comes and it repeats.
5. The youngest pops up at the counter and sits on the high top chairs.
6. Momma, what is this for?
 - a. It's for the Lord.

¹ Frank Thielman, *Romans*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 538.

- b. Will He eat it?
- c. Not in a way that we can see, but it's His.
- d. Why are you wasting it?
- e. I'm not wasting it, because **Whatever we give to the Lord isn't wasted.**

7. In a way that doesn't make sense, by giving to the Lord the first the rest is blessed.

- a. Here's the reality: This portion would likely be thrown away and definitely wouldn't be eaten.
- b. But the action of faith invited God in such a way that the rest was made holy.

B. Paul is saying that Israel is holy because the first was set apart for Him.

- 1. Because Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob served the Lord, the rest of Israel could be blessed.
- 2. Because Abraham is father of both the Jews and Gentiles (according to Romans) all can be blessed through Him.
- 3. Just as the dough is thrown away, the Patriarchs died.
- 4. But this setting apart points to God's active work in and through us, in incredible and ordinary ways.

C. Watch what happens when we read verses 28-29 in this context:

²⁸ Regarding the gospel, they are enemies for your advantage, but regarding election, they are loved because of the patriarchs, ²⁹ since God's gracious gifts and calling are irrevocable.

- 1. This is sometimes used to refer to people who are called into ministry and have a moral failure.
- 2. People will say the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable and without repentance, meaning we should let them keep ministering.
- 3. But this passage isn't about us: but God's plans and purposes.
- 4. Because the Patriarchs were set aside, set apart, and made holy, all the world can be blessed.
- 5. The Word and Power of God won't fail because God doesn't change.

Paul then shifts his illustration to that of an Olive Tree.

What can an olive tree teach us about God?

This morning, let's tell the story of faith through the image of an Olive Tree.

Why an olive tree?

A. First, it was everywhere, and it could grow just about anywhere in that land.

1. Alongside the road, in the yard, in a terraced field, anywhere.
2. It was hardy and strong and incredibly useful.
3. Olives were eaten or pressed into oil for cooking, medicine, and lamp oil.

B. God declares this olive tree to be good.

1. Because the firstfruits are holy, so is the whole batch or crop.
2. And if the fruit of the tree is holy, then the root of the tree is holy, therefore the branches are holy.
3. The whole tree is good, righteous, and set apart for God and His purposes.

C. That which is unholy cannot produce holy fruit.

1. If the flour put in the bread is poisonous, the whole loaf is poison.
2. If the nuts in the brownies are poison, the whole brownie is poison.
3. It doesn't matter if you tithe off of it, give it all to missions, or how you give it to God.
4. If the roots are evil, the fruit is evil.

What or Who is the Olive Tree?

A. The Olive Tree represents the Kingdom and God's plan through Israel.

1. The roots, the foundation, seem to be the Patriarchs.
2. Those original encounters and dealings between God and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

3. As imperfect as they were, they were men who believed.
- B. This was the group given the promises, the Torah, the Covenant.
1. They were given the Promised Land, and the Exile.
 2. And in Paul's day, many were rejecting Christ.
 3. These branches from this cultivated tree were being cut off because they were not producing fruit.
- C. The other tree is a wild one, and it's the Gentiles.
1. It grew up naturally without a definite plan.
 2. For those of you who are gardeners, you might think of it as a volunteer olive tree (a happy accident).
 3. Of course, the Jewish people thought this wild olive tree was a weed (something unwanted).
- D. Both trees produce olives.
1. This is not a story of apples and olives.
 2. This is olives, producing the same kind of fruit but with different levels of care.
 3. God had CAREFULLY cultivated the Jews to produce and bless the nations, but they didn't.
 4. So, in Paul's allegory, God looks over to the wild olive tree, producing fruit, and now works them into the plan.

Romans 11:17 (CSB)

¹⁷ Now if some of the branches were broken off, and you, though a wild olive branch, were grafted in among them and have come to share in the rich root of the cultivated olive tree,

The Wrong Kind of Grafting.

A. GRAFTING: This is a horticultural process by which the branches from a cultivated tree may be inserted and grafting take place.²

² Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard Frederic Vos, and John Rea, *The Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia* (Moody Press, 1975).

1. A small selection of a tree or a branch would be cut in the most delicate of ways.
2. It would be attached to the host, notched or tied so that the two might become one.

B. What Paul describes next is backwards from the thoughts of the day.

1. In Paul's picture, it isn't the cultivated tree that saves the wild/weed tree.
2. But the wild is grafted into the cultivated.

Romans 11:24 (CSB)

²⁴For if you were cut off from your native wild olive tree and against nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these—the natural branches—be grafted into their own olive tree?

3. Science has proven why this was the order Paul chose.

C. When a cultivated olive tree is struggling to produce, the graft from the wild olive tree brings vitality to the original.

1. In such an unusual grafting, it is said, both the graft and the stock on to which it is grafted are affected: the old stock is reinvigorated by the new graft, and the new graft in turn, fed by the sap of the olive stock, is able to bear such fruit as the wild-olive could never produce.³
2. When the olive tree isn't producing, you can either destroy it or redeem it.
3. God chose to redeem it through pruning and grafting.
4. He didn't start over with a new Israel, He grafted the Gentiles into the original.

A Painful Process

Romans 11:17–23 (CSB)

¹⁷Now if some of the branches were broken off, and you, though a wild olive branch, were grafted in among them and have come to share in the rich root of the cultivated olive tree, ¹⁸do not boast that you are better than those branches. But if you do boast—you do not sustain the root, but the root sustains you. ¹⁹Then you will say, “Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.” ²⁰True enough; they were broken off because of unbelief, but you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but beware; ²¹because if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not

³ F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 213.

spare you either. ²² Therefore, consider God's kindness and severity: severity toward those who have fallen but God's kindness toward you—if you remain in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. ²³ And even they, if they do not remain in unbelief, will be grafted in, because God has the power to graft them in again.

A. When things aren't working, some things must go.

1. Paul is describing the removal of limbs.
2. These are the people and families who refuse to accept Jesus as Savior.
 - a. It didn't matter if they were Jewish or not.
 - b. Ethnicity isn't what saved them, but faith and belief in Jesus.
3. Faith and belief are what connect us to God.
 - a. It doesn't matter where you are from, what you have given, or anything else.
 - b. Faith and belief in Jesus is the great equalizer.
 - c. It is level at the cross, for ALL who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.
4. The Jews who refused to believe were cut off and the wild-shoots, the Gentiles were grafted in that place.

B. If the grafts don't produce, they can be cut off too.

1. Paul says, "Don't be arrogant."
2. You in Rome aren't so special that God won't cut you off.
3. If we do not remain in belief and faith, God will not spare you either. Vs. 21

C. Consider God's kindness and severity.

1. I don't know if olive trees can feel pain.
2. But I know this:
 - a. When people reject Jesus as Savior, the pain is unimaginable.
 - b. When people believe and then walk away, the cutting that takes place is hurts more than never being grafted to begin with.
 - c. Scripture says their condition is even worse.

3. God, in His Kindness, is a God who restores.
4. God, in His Severity, is a God who cuts away.
5. Same God, different sides of the coin.
6. **God's Kindness and Severity are not contradictory but complementary.**

D. The Apostle is showing the complementary nature of God.

1. He is a God deeply committed to the growth and fruitfulness of the Olive Tree.
2. The Kingdom will grow, produce, and expand.
3. The Tree was declared holy long ago, and God is forever committed to this plan.
4. Your involvement, however, is up to you.

E. The only thing that keeps the graft connected is Belief and faith.

1. What causes us to be cut off?
2. Unbelief and no faith.

F. Unbelief is more than doubts.

1. Someone in the room is confusing doubts with unbelief.
2. **Doubts are moments, unbelief is behavior.**
3. When I stand at the graveside of a loved one, I may have doubts.
4. When I live a lifestyle that is unholy, unrighteous, and dishonoring to God, I'm living in unbelief.

Branches have no reason to be prideful. Vs 20b

A. Paul warns Rome and Us: DO NOT BE ARROGANT, BUT BEWARE

1. He says it again in Verse 25: Don't be ignorant or conceited.
2. Ignorance, pride and conceit cause us to forget that it is Jesus that saves us.
3. He's the master gardener, cutting, grafting, redeeming, and nurturing.
4. If we are connected to God through faith, and not by works, we have no reason or room for arrogance.

B. We are connected to God only because of His loving kindness.

1. It was God's kindness that chose Abraham as the conduit of blessing.
2. It is God's kindness that causes Him to look upon us and graft us into an amazing kingdom.
3. And when it is all done, and Jesus returns and the dead in Christ rise from the dead, we will see the kindness of God to all who believe.
4. In that day, all who are grafted into the Olive Tree, the natural and the wild, the cultivated and the volunteer, the Jew and Gentile, all will be saved.
5. Or, as Paul says,

Romans 11:25–27 (CSB)

²⁵ I don't want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you will not be conceited: 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, as it is written,

**The Deliverer will come from Zion;
he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.
²⁷ And this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins.**

What Does the Olive Tree teach us about the life of Faith?

#1. What we give to God is never wasted.

1. How committed are we to putting Jesus first in our lives?
2. Have we put Him first in our money, our time, our day, our family?
3. We may not set aside a portion of our food for God, but what are some ways we can publicly illustrate our commitment to put Jesus first?
 - a. This is why worshipping at the front or coming to the altar is powerful.
 - b. It is a public proclamation that I'm trying to put Jesus first and I want my family to see it.

#2. Belief is the currency of the Kingdom.

1. We can THINK we are believers but our habits, behaviors, thoughts and actions might show otherwise.
2. Romans 12:1 is going to smack us in the face because the APPLICATION of the text is this: Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of the mind.
3. What enables us to be grafted into the Kingdom is our belief in Jesus as Lord and Savior.
4. If we give away that belief, we can be cut off too.
5. I'm not talking about doubts, not moments or seasons, but a continual disposition to NOT believe.
6. All the language Paul uses in this illustration is conditional: As long as we remain in Him, we are in Him.

#3. The only Stand that matters is the one made by faith:

1. In verse 20, the Gentiles were told they stand by faith.
2. Stand can be used in lots of ways, but here it means to stand firm in belief, a personal commitment to something.
3. What enables us to be grafted into the tree, into the family, is in part due to a personal commitment to follow Jesus.
4. Americans love to make a stand.
 - a. This attitude is what makes us a force to reckon with.
 - b. But the only stand that matters is our personal commitment to follow Jesus.
 - c. Have you made a personal commitment to follow Jesus, no matter the cost?
 - d. Will you stand when the breaking and grafting is more painful than you thought?
 - e. The old song has been one of Julie and I's themes lately:
 1. Though none go with me, still I will follow...
 2. Will we stand and stay connected to Jesus through it all.

#4. Lastly, We Need Vitality.

1. I sense a strong need for this body to experience the kind of growth and vitality that grafting brings.
2. A couple of years ago, this church had a vitality and energy that was from God.
 - a. We've lost it and I want it back.
 - b. I see it in our worship, our praying, our general disposition.
 - c. We LOVE people, perhaps at the expense of loving God first.
3. Just like every marriage eventually needs a rekindling, we need a rekindling.
 - a. For Israel, the rekindling was the introduction of the wild root.
 - b. What are you willing to do to experience a deeper love than ever before?
 - c. What are you willing to have cut off so that you can have more of Jesus?
 - d. What are you willing to offer and suffer so that we might experience the fullness of God's plans for ourselves, our church, and community?

Psalm 85 (CSB)

Psalm 85

RESTORATION OF FAVOR

For the choir director. A psalm of the sons of Korah.

¹ LORD, you showed favor to your land;
you restored the fortunes of Jacob.
² You forgave your people's guilt;
you covered all their sin.

Selah

³ You withdrew all your fury;
you turned from your burning anger.

⁴ Return to us, God of our salvation,
and abandon your displeasure with us.

⁵ Will you be angry with us forever?
Will you prolong your anger for all generations?

⁶ Will you not revive us again
so that your people may rejoice in you?

⁷ Show us your faithful love, LORD,
and give us your salvation.

⁸ I will listen to what God will say;
surely the LORD will declare peace
to his people, his faithful ones,
and not let them go back to foolish ways.

⁹ His salvation is very near those who fear him,
so that glory may dwell in our land.

¹⁰ Faithful love and truth will join together;
righteousness and peace will embrace.

¹¹ Truth will spring up from the earth,
and righteousness will look down from heaven.

¹² Also, the LORD will provide what is good,
and our land will yield its crops.

¹³ Righteousness will go before him
to prepare the way for his steps.