

# Faith Leaves No Room For Arrogance ~ Romans 11:11-21

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ March 17, 2013

Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their full inclusion bring! I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. For if their rejection brought reconciliation to the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 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. 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.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

One of the nice things about growing up in Africa was not only the nice weather, similar to what we are having right now, but also experiencing a different culture. At the time, it was the only culture I knew, but especially now, I treasure those years. The culture in Malawi was more laid back, the people were friendly even though they had very little in the way of material wealth. Part of their friendliness was reflected in one of the "unofficial" mottos of Malawi, or at least we called it an unofficial motto. "There's always room for one more." This would often be said by mini-van drivers, or pick-up trucks. There was always room for one more person, one more chicken, one more pound of smelly fish. And driving along the roads of Malawi you could see this first hand, as you had scenes like the one on the screen with a truck or a van busting at the seams.

Now, I have no idea how they managed to cram that much cargo together in one vehicle, but even I know there is a limit to how much material can fit into a finite space. There isn't always room for one more, sometimes you just have to say no. The apostle Paul in the letter to the Christians living in Rome writes about faith in a similar way. FAITH LEAVES NO ROOM FOR ARROGANCE. Faith is not something that you can be arrogant about, Paul says, in fact, faith takes the exact opposite attitude, humility, or "trembling" as the NIV puts it. FAITH LEAVES NO ROOM FOR ARROGANCE:

1. It is rooted in the promise of history
2. It branches out with the promise to the future

There are mistaken ideas out there about the outcome of the Jewish people. I'm not talking about what is going on in the Middle East right now, but I'm talking about the outcome of the Jews spiritually. There are many people out there, including some Christian who take the view that the Jews will be saved

and go to heaven simply because they are Jews, the Bible never says that. There are other people out there who think that there won't be any Jews in heaven because they rejected Jesus the messiah sent from God, the Bible doesn't say that either. It is in this particular section of Scripture that Paul gives us a little insight into this whole issue, Romans chapter 11.

In the lead up to the verses that we read in our second lesson for this morning, Paul explains why God "included" the Gentiles in his plan of salvation. It was because of Israel's rejection, Paul writes, **"What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened."** A natural question to ask then is what Paul opens our lesson with this morning, **"Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery?"** Did they make such a mistake, that God will never forgive them? Paul answers with an emphatic "NO!" But this certainly gave the Jews no reason to go and do what they did. And Paul goes on to explain the problem.

Now, what application can we draw as Christians from the mistake of the Jews? Much in every way. As Christians we are God's people, the new Israel, and the warnings and encouragement Paul had for his own people, he has for us as well. He uses an example from the world of agriculture, that of a plant, with its roots and its branches. This morning we take a look at that plant – with its roots firmly planted in the promise of history, and it's branches reaching eagerly with the promise to the future.

(1)

The whole underlying message in this section is that FAITH LEAVES NO ROOM FOR ARROGANCE. Because what is faith but a simple trust in the promises of God. Faith is not something you can or should get arrogant about. It was a faith in the promise of God that Adam and Eve trusted in the Garden of Eden, it was faith Noah showed in God's protecting hand throughout a worldwide flood. It was faith Abraham showed in God's promise to send him a son in his old age. It was faith Jacob showed when he left the land of promise to go down to Egypt in a famine. It was faith Moses showed in facing an all-powerful Pharaoh and leading the people through the Red Sea. It was faith Joshua showed in mustering the Israelites to conquer the promised land. I could go on and on, but you get my point.

It is this faith that was demonstrated time and time again by the patriarchs and those that followed them. But it was not a blind faith, it was a faith in the promise of God. The promise of God to send a Savior. They did not see the Savior in their lifetimes, but they trusted in God's promise that he would come, this is what they put their faith in. Their FAITH LEFT NO ROOM FOR ARROGANCE. Their faith was rooted in the promise of history.

It is this faith that Paul is talking about when he writes, **"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"** What made the patriarchs holy? It was the faith they held, the trust in God's promise of a Savior. And it was the same faith that would keep God's people holy. Somewhere along the line another thought of what it took to be holy crept in. The thought that it was not faith in God promise that made you holy, but rather following God's commands, or simply being part of God's people.

The only unfortunate thing is this thought began to dominate Jewish thinking. They became arrogant about their status as Jews, they became arrogant about "perfectly" being able to follow God's laws. And worst of all, this arrogance led them to reject everything the law was pointing towards. They turned their back on the promise of a Savior. For it was the Jews who cried before Pontius Pilate, "Crucify

him! Crucify him!" **"Because of this transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles."** That's you and me! God worked through the greatest injustice of history to graft us into the vine. To make us a part of his family, to be nourished from the root. And maybe it helps to understand a little bit about agriculture to appreciate Paul's metaphor.

The olive tree was the most widely cultivated fruit in the Middle East. And the interesting thing about olive trees (like several other trees), is that you can take a branch from one tree and insert it into another to help it grow. The picture that is painted here is taking a wild olive shoot, something that naturally is not productive, and graft it into the cultivated olive tree. In this way the wild olive shoot can receive nourishment from the roots of the cultivated olive tree.

As believers, we have been inserted into the olive tree that is God's family. We receive our nourishment from the olive root. The root is the promise that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had, the promise of a Savior. A Savior who would come and rescue us from sin's grasp. A Savior who did come, in the person of Jesus who lived and died for us. Our faith is rooted in the promise of history. This FAITH LEAVES NO ROOM FOR ARROGANCE. **"We stand by faith."**

This entire section talks about the wonderful blessing it is for us to be part of God's family. That it is only because we have been grafted into the vine are we holy. But just as it was so easy for an opposing thought to creep into Jewish thinking, it is easy for an opposing thought to creep into our thinking as well. To think that we do not stand by faith. Now that may seem absurd, especially as Lutherans who tout "By faith alone." But how absurd is it? If you ask any Jew today if they believe in God's promise of a Messiah, I'm sure they would say "yes," just as we say, "by faith in Jesus Christ." So where does it all go wrong? It all goes wrong when we allow arrogance to creep in.

It is the arrogance that we may have as faithful Bible-reading, church-going Christians. It is the arrogance that we may have as pastors, or teachers, or leaders. It may be the arrogance that we may have as big givers. It may be the arrogance we may have when we feel our-faith-is-strong-enough-so-I-don't-have-to-do-anything-else-religious. Many of these things are not wrong in and of themselves, but it is the potentially "elitist" attitude that can result. An elitist attitude that thinks we are superior to others, that we help support the root. And that is an elitist attitude that we have all at times been guilty of. And the danger of arrogance is that it may quickly snuff out faith. Faith leaves no room for this elitist attitude. FAITH LEAVES NO ROOM FOR ARROGANCE. But it is rooted in the promise of history.

(2)

Faith gives us no reason to feel superior, because we draw our support, our nourishment from the same root, and it is the root that gives us life. Without the root, we would be dead. Without God grafting us to the vine, we would be dead. So because we are alive, faith branches out with the promise to the future. It is this future that Paul talks about for his own people, the Jews.

Paul certainly did not want the Jews to continue in their rejection, but he hoped by his work among the gentiles, he would get his own people to wake up and be grafted once more into the life-giving vine. It is this same attitude that we have as Christians. We know how much the nourishing sap of God's Word and sacraments has strengthened and enriched our lives, and we want others to share in these riches.

And how does this look? Well, you could be like Paul and travel the world, preaching the gospel wherever he got the opportunity. Or you could share the gospel by being friendly to guests when they come into church. You can share the gospel with the offerings that you give, you can share the gospel by how you act at work. One phrase that I always liked is a quote often attributed to Francis of Assisi, "Preach the gospel, and if necessary, use words." It brings across the point that preaching the gospel is not just done with our mouths, but it is done with our actions as well.

There was once a girl by the name of Faith, she was going on a car trip with her friends. They decided to use her car. She packed up her car with all the stuff she needed, and drove over to her friend's house. The only problem was that her friend Arrogance and all his baggage could not fit. FAITH LEFT NO ROOM FOR ARROGANCE. OK, so maybe that's a cheesy way of remembering not to get arrogant about our faith, but if it works, great. For there are many that have been broken off of the vine because of unbelief that resulted from arrogance.

While FAITH LEAVES NO ROOM FOR ARROGANCE, faith does leave room for other people. Just like the unofficial motto of Malawi is, "There's always room for one more," there's always room for more people to be grafted into the vine. And as branches in the vine, we do not play a part in making the root better, but it is the root that makes us alive. Therefore, we have no reason to consider ourselves superior, for the only boast we have is in that of Jesus Christ, our root. And as branches grafted into the vine we are nourished by that root, and are encouraged and motivated to branch out with that promise into the future. Amen!