

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Sovereign Grace; Sovereign Hardening

Romans 11:1-10

Introduction: Amen. Church you may be seated. And as you are being seated, go ahead and take your Bibles with me and turn to the Book of Romans, chapter 11.

Let me start this morning by being painfully honest with you about something. Can I do that? This last week I was equally frustrated and convicted by how often I've gotten things wrong in my life. I like to think I have wisdom and am pretty good at prognosticating world events, cultural events, pandemics, and so forth. And I was reminded this week (again!), that I don't know nearly as much as I think I know... and that I'm utterly dependent upon God for everything in my life.

And all of this conviction and self-loathing led me to a singer-songwriter named Keith Green and a song of his I used to sing in my early twenties. Keith Green, if you don't know, died 40 years ago in a plane crash in East Texas. He died when I was like four years old. But his music still resonates with me. And it was really important to me when I was a young man. He writes in his song "Trials Turned to Gold":

*The view from here is nothing near // To what it is for You
I tried to see Your plan for me // But I only acted like I knew
Oh Lord forgive the times // I tried to read your mind
Cause you said if I'd be still // Then I would hear your voice*

The lyric that has been reverberating in my soul all week is this lyric, "Oh Lord forgive the times, I tried to read your mind." That bad habit of mine has brought about a lot of frustration and conviction for me this week. And I wish I could say that it'll never happen again. "I'll never do it again, LORD... I'll never try to read your mind again, LORD... except I probably will." Praise God for grace. Right?

So Romans 11. What in the world does that have to do with Romans 11, Pastor Tony? Well I see at the beginning of Romans 11 people trying to read God's mind. Verse 1 says, "Has God rejected his people?" "So God is rejecting the Jews? Right, Paul? Is that what you are saying in Romans 9-10?" Paul says "No! That's not what I am saying. That's not what God is doing." And then Paul goes on to explain how God does what only God can do. God is both sovereignly bestowing grace on those whom he pleases, and he is sovereignly hardening others.

And those are the two main points of the message this morning. There is God's sovereign work of grace (verses 1-6). And there is God's sovereign work of hardening (verses 7-10). Sovereign grace. Sovereign hardening. These are the unmistakable works of God, and Paul writes about both.

Let's start with grace, because that's the fun part. That's the encouraging part: God's sovereign work of grace in verses 1-6.

1) God's sovereign work of **grace** (11:1-6)

Paul shows us three places where God's grace is evident, even when we might assume it's not existent. And it starts with Paul himself. You can write this down as 1a.

a) God's grace shown to **Paul**

Paul says,

¹ I ask, then, has God rejected his people?

"Has God rejected his people?"¹ "Has God forsaken the Israelites then, Paul? Has he now?" I understand the question. It's a very Gentile question to ask. Paul has just spent the last two chapters, Romans 9-

¹ This is essentially the question that Paul answers throughout all of Romans 11. R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), 193 says, "Paul concerns himself with the question of whether God has given up on Israel. It was a natural question because much of the nation was spiritually lost in Old Testament times, and likewise the bulk of the nation rejected the Messiah when he came. Paul's answer here will be that God is in no way done with the Jews—there is a future for the Jewish nation. This answer, as we shall see, carries with it some advice on how we are to regard the Jews."

10, talking about how the Jewish people have continually rejected the Messiah Jesus, and it breaks Paul's heart. The Jewish people have rejected Jesus. Has God rejected the Jewish people? Did God reject them first? Or did they reject God first? **It's kind of like you and your girlfriend in high school. She dumped you first, and then you dumped her in response just to save face. Who dumped who first? Or was it was "mutual."**

And Paul says, **"No! Listen. By no means 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.

Has God rejected his people, the Israelites? Paul says, **"No, I'm an Israelite, thank you very much." "I'm a descendant of Abraham. I'm a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God didn't dump me, and I haven't dumped God."** John Chrysostom, the church father, said it this way even 1600 plus years ago: **"God has not rejected his people, because Paul himself was one of them. If God had cast them off, he would not have chosen one of them as the one to whom he entrusted all his preaching, the affairs of the world, all the mysteries and the whole message of salvation."**² I said this a few weeks ago. Who wrote the NT? They were all Jewish except maybe Luke.

I think this is a very Gentile way of thinking because Gentiles have been trying to discount God's plan for the Israelites for 2000 years. **I even read this last week that the mild-mannered C.S. Lewis dealt with a period of anti-Semitism in his life.**³ **And it wasn't just him. Martin Luther says some things about Jews in his writings that'll just make you cringe.** And this has been a troubling part of the Christian church for 2000 years.

And yet at the same time, there has always been a remnant of Jewish believers in the church. They haven't been as prominent or preponderant as Gentile Christians. But they're still out there. And they have been historically part of the church. **I'll give you some examples. Benjamin Disraeli, the famous 19th century Prime Minister of England, was a Jewish Christian. Felix Mendelssohn, the famous composer who wrote the music for "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!" was a Jewish Christian. Joy Davidman, the famous author and wife of C.S. Lewis, was a Jewish Christian.**

This is personal for me too. I have friends who I went to school with at Moody who are Jewish Christians. The professor at Moody who taught me Hebrew, Michael Wechsler, is a Jewish Christian. So when Paul asks rhetorically, "has God rejected his people?" I think we can join Paul in saying, "Absolutely not! By no means!"

You know, just as a parallel, I can get really discouraged sometimes about our country and think, "O God, why have you abandoned us?" "We have rejected God! God has rejected us! We're done!" That's when I'm in lament mode after listening to certain podcasts. But then I think to myself. "Now wait a second, God hasn't abandoned America completely. How do I know that's truth? I'm an American." And last time I checked Harvest Decatur is still in America. Is that still true? And Jesus promised us, "I am with you always to the end of the age" (Matt 28:20).

Paul has a similar experience here where he says, **"God has not abandoned his people or rejected his people. I am proof positive right here of that."** Look at **verse 2.**

² *God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.*

In other words, there is a remnant of people within Israel including Paul whom God foreknew all along would embrace Christ and follow Christ. Sure lots and lots of Jews have rejected Jesus. That's part of the reason Paul is lamenting here in **Romans**. But lots of Jews have embraced Jesus too.

Think about Peter and John in the NT. Think about Philip and Thomas and Nathaniel in the NT. They were Jewish. Think about Barnabas and Apollos. Even Timothy was half-Jewish. His mom was Jewish. And you know what they say in a Jewish family, **"If your mom is Jewish, then you're Jewish!"** Think too about the 3,000 people that got saved and baptized in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:41).⁴ All 3,000 of those people were Jewish. And all of those God foreknew. It's interesting to me, how Paul once again defers to God's sovereignty here. **"God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew."** God's gonna get done what God's

² Quoted in Gerald Bray, ed., *Romans (Revised)*, ACCOS (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 274.

³ Hughes, *Romans*, 192.

⁴ THEODORET OF CYRRHUS, *IER*, Migne PG 82 col. 172, quoted Gerald Bray, ed., *Romans (Revised)*, ACCOS (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 27 says, "Paul could have supported his statement by referring to the 3,000 who believed at Jerusalem and to the many thousands spoken of by St. James [Acts 21:20], not to mention all those Jews of the diaspora who believed the message. But instead he uses himself as an example." But surely Paul was alluding to those 3,000 plus Jews while also pointing out the thousands and thousands who had rejected the gospel.

wants done. Don't try to guess what God is doing. He's got this. He's got the whole world in the palm of his hands. He's got human history in the palm of his hand.

Now we shouldn't try to read God's mind or guess what God is doing. But what Paul says next is that what God is doing is not unheard of, though. In fact there a real OT paradigm for what Paul was seeing in his day. And that paradigm comes from the life of Elijah.

You can write this down under 2b. Paul gives us secondly an example from the OT.

b) God's grace shown to **Elijah**

Paul says in **verse 2**,⁵

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."

Can you feel the despair in Elijah's words there? By the way, Elijah lived and minister in the time of Israel's deepest apostasy. King Ahab, one of the most evil and worthless kings was on the throne. His wife the idol-worshipping Phoenician queen, Jezebel, was actively destroying Yahweh worship throughout the kingdom and replacing it with Baal and Asherah worship.⁶ Elijah made the mistake way back in the time of King Ahab of guessing what was going on in the world. And he's very dramatic about it. **"O God. I'm all alone! O God, they're going to wipe out your faithful followers. It's over. The sky is falling. You're not going to have anybody left, LORD."**

And look at how God responds to that. God says, **"I beg your pardon!" "I beg your pardon, Elijah."** You'll have to forgive Elijah. Elijah is a prophet/preacher from the OT. You know how those preachers are. They are emotional. They hyperbolize.⁷

And look at **verse 4**,

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."

"I beg your pardon, Elijah. Don't assume you know what I'm doing in this world. Don't overstate the case. I've got 7,000 men who are on my side, so don't you worry." I think part of what God is saying here to Elijah is this. **"Elijah if you die, I'm going to be okay. Don't you worry! Your ministry to me is replaceable."** I don't know if that hurt Elijah's feelings, but that would have hurt my feelings. Because we like to think of ourselves as indispensable. We like to think of ourselves as the only ones who can get done the work God wants done. And God says, **"No, I'm good. We'll be alright without you, Elijah."**

By the way notice how that OT Scripture balances God's sovereignty and human responsibility. God says, **"I have kept"** in verse 4. **"I have kept 7,000."** And then he says, **"7,000 who have not bowed the knee to Baal."** God's sovereignty—"I have kept." Human responsibility—"not bowed the knee."⁸ **You know it's funny in the Bible how Paul and God and others just put these things together like we should just accept it and not try to philosophically "crack the code" of how God's sovereignty and human responsibility come together.**

And let me just give you a little bit of historical context for that passage in **1 Kings** where Elijah says, "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." Elijah said that in **1 Kings 19** right after the most amazing experience of his life in **1 Kings 18**, when God showed up incredibly. He had just had this amazing encounter with the priests of Baal. Here's what happens. Elijah went up to Mount Carmel with these priests. And they had a little contest to see whose god is greater: Yahweh or Baal. Whose "god" would conjure up fire on this altar? And Elijah, very gentlemanly, let the priests of Baal go first. And they tried like crazy to get Baal to respond to their religious pleadings. They even cut themselves and wailed like maniacs to get Baal's attention. And Elijah started to mock them. Seriously. **I used to read this story to Alastair in his Action Bible and he would laugh and laugh. This was his favorite story from the OT.** Elijah said, **"Pray louder, maybe Baal is in the bathroom and he can't hear you."** That comes right out of the Hebrew of the OT!

⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 677: "It is possible that Paul also finds a parallel between Elijah and himself: each is a key salvation-historical figure, is confronted with the apparent downfall of spiritual Israel, but finds new hope in God's preservation of a remnant of true believers."

⁶ Craig S. Keener, *IVPBCNT* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Ro 11:2-4: "The Elijah narrative in 1 Kings 19:10, 14 and 18 indicates that at the time of Israel's deepest apostasy, a remnant had still avoided idolatry. It may be relevant that some Jewish traditions presented Elijah as zealous for God but not patriotic enough for Israel."

⁷ Grant Osborne, *Romans: Verse by Verse* (Bellingham: Lexham, 2017), 335 calls this one of life's great ironies that the great prophet who defeated 450 prophets of Baal ran for his life afterwards into the wilderness. "He had already forgotten how God empowered him on Mount Carmel!"

⁸ Osborne, *Romans*, 335.

And after these priests of Baal failed royally to get the job done, Elijah prayed to the Lord and the Lord reigned down fire from heaven and consumed the altar. It was the greatest public demonstration of God's power in Elijah's life. And the people fell on their faces and said, "Yahweh is God. Yahweh is God" (1 Kings 18:39). Take that Baal! **Man, I would love to see something like that in Decatur.**

But right after that Queen Jezebel gets angry and threatens Elijah's life. So Elijah gets scared and runs for his life. And after he runs away, Elijah is alone and depressed and asks God to let him die. He's an emotional wreck. And in that desperate situation he cries out, "Why God? Why? "The people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:10, 14). God says, "**now, now, little child, get back to work. Stop stressing out of this stuff.**" And he actually gives Elijah some stuff to do. Go do this. Go do that. That's a good remedy for people who are isolated and are feeling depressed. Go do some stuff. And then concerning Elijah being alone, God says, "**I got this, Elijah.**" "**You're not alone.**" "**I've got 7,000 people who have not bowed the knee to Baal.**"⁹

And even if those 7,000 were just 700 or just 7, what God is really saying is that there's no reason to despair, Elijah. God knows what he's doing in this world, and we can trust in his sovereignty. So relax and let God do what he's going to do. **Grant Osborne** says in his commentary, "**When God is in charge, a small number like the seven thousand in Elijah's time or the Twelve in Jesus' time is in reality a vast, invincible army.**"¹⁰

And that's what Paul is stressing in **Romans**. That's what Paul is using that story of Elijah to communicate. Look at **verse 5**.

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

God's got his remnant in the time of Elijah. God's got his remnant now. Don't sweat it. Just trust God.

Go ahead and write this down as 1c in your notes.

c) God's grace shown to a **remnant**

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.

In other words, God's sovereign grace is going to accomplish what God wants to accomplish. Yes, Paul is heartbroken about the Jews. Yes. Paul is anxious to get the message out. Yes, Paul says in the previous chapter, "How can they believe without hearing the gospel? And how can they hear the gospel without someone preaching it to them?" Yes. Yes. Yes. We do what God calls us to do, and then we leave the results to him. **As I heard in a podcast this last week, we preach like an Arminian and sleep like a Calvinist.** We do our duty before God, and then we go to sleep and trust God with the results. And God assures us that there is a remnant chosen by him that remains as part of the fulfillment of his promise.¹¹

Notice if you will how Paul works in the grace-not-works theme in **verse six**. Paul just can't drift too far from grace-based salvation. He hasn't mentioned this in a while. But it's definitely the most important theological axiom in this book. So Paul gives you a little reminder here in **verse 6**. By the way, don't forget. We aren't saved by works. We are saved by grace. We know, Paul, thanks. You said it like a hundred times already in the **Book of Romans**. But this is important here because Paul is explicitly linking the idea of sovereignty with the concept of grace. And Paul is explicitly linking the concept of a remnant with the concept of grace. **Tim Keller** says it this way, "**Paul means this [in verses 5-6]: what guarantees that there will always be a faithful remnant is not that there is always a set of good, decent people who will believe, but rather that there is always the grace of God. It is God who preserves a remnant. Those who believe do so entirely because of grace.**" "**Is God going to preserve a remnant of Christ-followers here in America, Pastor Tony?**" **Yes, I think so. That's been his pattern throughout history in Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Germany, France, and England. And if God does choose to do that, it's not going to be because we in America are so deserving compared to the rest of the world. If he does it in America, it will be because of his sovereign grace.**

⁹ Christopher Ash says, "7000 rather than just one, so don't give up on evangelism to hardened people!" See his *Teaching Romans: Unlocking Romans 9–16 for the Bible Teacher*, ed. David Jackman and Robin Sydserff, vol. 2, Teach the Bible (Ross-shire, Scotland; London: Proclamation Trust Media; Christian Focus Publications, 2009), 114.

¹⁰ Osborne, *Romans*, 336.

¹¹ This has proven true for the Jewish people throughout the centuries. Even Augustine said approximately 300 years after Paul, "The 'remnant' refers to the Jews who have believed in Christ. Many of them did believe in the days of the apostles, and even today there are some converts, though very few." Quoted in Gerald Bray, ed., *Romans (Revised)*, ACCOS (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 276.

Now here's where our text gets more sobering. We love talking about God's sovereignty when it comes to grace. We love it when it reinforces our chosenness and our identity as children of God. But we don't love it as much when it has to do with God's work of hardening the hearts of unbelievers.¹² Paul says in **verse 1-6**, God sovereignly chose the remnant. He also sovereignly hardened the non-remnant.

You can write this down as the second point of the message. There's God's sovereign work of grace, and there's...

2) God's sovereign work of **hardening** (11:7-10)

Paul says in **verse 7**.

⁷ What then?

"What then?" It's the shortest rhetorical question in **Romans**? What then? What should we conclude about all this? Here's the conclusion.

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

God rejects Israel, but not all Israel. God sovereignly chooses by grace his elect, and God sovereignly hardens the rest.¹³ Is Israel still held responsible for her actions? Yes, God is sovereign and man is responsible. Put both of those in your theology pipe and smoke it.

In fact the same language that is used of Pharaoh in the OT is used of Israel here by Paul.¹⁴ That would have been offensive to Paul's Jewish readers. You mean God hardened us like he hardened Pharaoh the great enemy of the Jews in the book of Exodus. No way, Paul! No way! Yes. Pharaoh hardened his heart, God hardened his heart. Pharaoh hardened his heart. God hardened Pharaoh's heart. Same thing in Paul's day. The Jews hardened their heart towards Messiah Jesus. God hardened the hearts of the Jews. They hardened. God hardened. The elect obtained the truth. The non-elect rejected it. As it is written... Let's look at the two Scriptures Paul quotes. First, **Isaiah 29:10**.

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."

Jesus said of the Jews in his days, "**ever hearing never understanding, ever seeing not perceiving**" (cf. **Matt 13:10-16**). That quotation came from Isaiah too. You can preach till you are blue in the face, but God has to awaken someone's soul to salvation. In Paul's case he saw when he preached to the Jews that they had a "spirit of stupor." In Greek that word is *κατάνυξις* and it means "bewilderment, numbness or even deep sleep."¹⁵ In Hebrew the word is *תַּרְדֵּמָה* (*tār-dē-māh*), and it means "deep sleep."¹⁶ God puts recalcitrant people to sleep. And you can't wake them up. God has to wake them up.

And Paul is not content to just quote one passage on this. He quotes another in **verse 9**, this time from David in the **Book of Psalms**.¹⁷

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."

The table is a symbol of closeness and fellowship and relationship.¹⁸ You eat at table with another person. The Jews had a closeness to God by virtue of their ethnicity. But that closeness has become a snare. That table has become a stumbling block.¹⁹ Familiarity has bred contempt. And David says, "let their eyes be

¹² Even this is paradoxically a show of God's grace, because God's hardening of the Jews leads to salvation for the Gentiles. This is the next part of Paul's argument in Romans 11:11-24. See F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6, TNTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 209: "Repeatedly in the Acts of the Apostles it is the refusal of the Jewish community in one place or another to accept the proffered salvation that is the occasion for the missionaries' presenting it directly to the Gentiles. 'It was necessary', said Paul and Barnabas to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch, 'that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles' (Acts 13:46; cf. 28:28)."

¹³ D. Stuart Briscoe and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Romans*, vol. 29, The Preacher's Commentary Series (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 204-205: "The remnant, having been saved by grace through faith, are clearly discernible among those natural-born sons of Abraham who, unlike their father, choose to seek justification through their works rather than the way ordained by God."

¹⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1996), 550: "They had been hardened ... This was the result of their resisting the truth, just as Pharaoh's heart was hardened because he resisted the truth."

¹⁵ **30.19** *κατάνυξις*, Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 351. See also **29.19** *κατάνυξις*, James Swanson, *DBL: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

¹⁶ **9554** *תַּרְדֵּמָה*, James Swanson, *DBL: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997). Derived from *רָדַם* (**#8101**) "go to sleep"? See also Willem VanGemeren, ed., *NIDOTTE* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 334.

¹⁷ Moo, *Romans*, NICOT, 681: "In vv. 8-10 Paul supports his reference to hardening with two OT quotations. He follows Jewish precedent in using each of the three main divisions of the Hebrew canon: the 'law' (Deut. 29:4), the prophets (Isa. 29:10), and the 'writings' (Ps. 69:22-23)."

¹⁸ Moo, *Romans*, NICOT 683 disagrees and says, "Paul probably did not intend to apply the details in the quotation to the Jews of his own day. Thus it is fruitless to inquire about what the 'table' might stand for, or what 'bending the backs' might connote."

¹⁹ Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, ed. D. A. Carson, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 427 says, "we should probably recognize that he simply intends his audience to see a parallel between what God himself does (gives people a spirit of stupor, eyes that cannot see and ears that cannot hear) and what David asks God to do to his enemies (to use the good thing they enjoy to put a stumbling block in their path)."

darkened... bend their back forever.” These are statements that David made in **Psalm 69** about his enemies.²⁰ Paul now uses these words to speak of Israelites in Paul’s day that have become enemies. There is great irony here. The sons of David, the Israelites, have become the enemies David wrote about because they rejected the Son of David, Jesus Christ. Their eyes are darkened. Their backs are bent. Their necks are stubborn. Their hearts are hardened. Their spirits are stupefied. Only God can awaken them.

You know there something at the same time comforting and frustrating about that. It’s not just Jews in Paul’s day. Nobody is getting saved by your preaching unless God opens their heart to the gospel. That’s frustrating, because it’s outside of my control. I like being in control. I like being really, really eloquent when I share the gospel. I want to bowl them away with my experience and intellect. But I’m not getting through to them, no matter what, unless God opens their eyes to the truth. That’s a work that God has to do.

That’s frustrating but it’s comforting. It’s comforting because I don’t have to hold myself responsible for fumbling the gospel presentation. God doesn’t hold me responsible for that. And I’m thankful for that. I do the best I can and then leave the results to God.

When I first started preaching in Arthur, I had this guy come to church for the first time. And I knew that this guy didn’t know the LORD. So I preached my best, but it wasn’t good. And then I went to talk to him afterwards and I was like Johnny Butterfingers carrying the football. I just fumbled that gospel football right out of my hands. And I went to one of my elders at the time, Chris Helmuth, and I was commiserating with him. And he said, “Tony, just relax. God doesn’t need you to perfectly preach the gospel for someone to get saved. You did your best. It’s up to him now. Relax.” If you know Chris Helmuth, you know that’s the kind of thing that he would say. And I did relax. And that was comforting.

Look, I know this is tough for us to understand and maybe even for us to swallow. But God sovereignly chooses those who follow him, whether it’s Paul and the 3,000 Jews in Jerusalem or Elijah and 7,000 Israelites, or Pastor Tony and his church of 150 in Decatur, Illinois. God didn’t have to save any of us. But he does. And he’s good. And we can trust him to do what he promises.

And I don’t know who is saved and who is not saved. I don’t know who is elect and who isn’t. All I know is that I’m going to serve and worship God till the day I die, and then I’m going to go home to glory. And someday in eternity I’m going to worship with Jews and Gentiles, males and females, people from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people.

I don’t know what’s going to happen tomorrow. I don’t know what’s going to happen in the next week. If 2020 has taught me anything, it’s taught me that all prognostications, unless they come from God, need to be taken with a grain of salt. But I know this. I know that my future is with God for eternity. I have put my faith in Jesus Christ. And God sovereignly does his work of grace and God sovereignly does his work of hardening. Amen and Amen. So be it.

I’ll close with this. Some of you know that I’ve tried to keep track of the age at which people died to remind myself of how , so I remember turning 30 and thinking now I’ve outlived Robert Murray M’Cheyne. I remember turning 40 and thinking, now I’ve outlived Martin Luther King and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I remember turning 42 and thinking, now I’m at the age of Stephen Decatur when he died. Hopefully I don’t die like he died, in a duel with pistols. Well I found out this last week that the great hymn-writer, Frances Havergal, died at age 42. That’s sobering. Havergal wrote hymns like Take “My Life and Let it Be” and “Like a river glorious.” I sang these songs repeatedly in my youth, and I still sing them today.

Well Havergal wrote this song in 1877 just a few years before she died entitled “Who is on the Lord’s side?” And I want to close with it. Havergal wrote:

*Who is on the Lord’s side? Who will serve the King?
Who will be His helpers, other lives to bring?
Who will leave the world’s side? Who will face the foe?
Who is on the Lord’s side? Who for Him will go?
By Thy call of mercy, by Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord’s side—Savior, we are Thine!*

²⁰ Ibid.

*Not for weight of glory, nor for crown and palm,
Enter we the army, raise the warrior psalm;
But for love that claimeth lives for whom He died:
He whom Jesus saveth marches on His side.
By Thy love constraining, by Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side—Savior, we are Thine!
Jesus, Thou hast bought us, not with gold or gem,
But with Thine own lifeblood, for Thy diadem;
With Thy blessing filling each who comes to Thee,
Thou hast made us willing, Thou hast made us free.
By Thy grand redemption, by Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side—Savior, we are Thine!*

42 years old she was when God called her home, the author of that hymn. Frances Havergal. 42 years old. Some of you might say 42 years young, I've got some years on her.

I feel like I've said this already a few times from this pulpit, but it bears repeating. I don't know ultimately who is saved and who is unsaved... who is elect and who isn't... who is a recipient of God's sovereign grace and who receives God's sovereign hardening... I don't know. Please don't ask me. Like I said at the beginning of this message, "Lord forgive the times, I tried to read your mind." I don't know God's sovereign plan for others in this world. All I know, all I can say for myself is that Jesus Christ is my Savior and my Lord. He belongs to me. I belong to him. I'm going to follow him.

Come with me. Come with me. Put your faith in Jesus Christ and come follow him.
We are on the Lord's side—Savior, we are Thine!