** Leader Guide**

**Sunday, June 24, 2018**

**Righteous Lord**

**Sermon Text:** Psalm 11

**Study Texts:** Romans 11:17-24

**Sermon Recap**: Psalm 11 is what is considered an “individual lament,” meaning that it is David lamenting and praying over a particular situation in his life. In this case, he is most likely being pursued by King Saul, and Saul desires to kill him. Throughout the Psalm, David’s focus is on the sovereign control of God over everything, including his present situation. David’s focus is on something greater than immediate salvation from Saul’s persecution. David’s focus is on the righteous character of God Who “.*..is in His holy temple*.” David’s confidence comes from knowing that God’s righteous character will not let sin and injustice go unpunished, whether that be in his present persecution or eternally. The righteousness of God is the great hope for God’s people and the great fear of God’s enemies.

**Sermon Connection:** Psalm 11 gives us a look into the righteousness of God. It shows both His goodness toward His people and His wrath toward sin. *And so we recognize that God’s righteousness contains both divine goodness and divine severity.* In Romans 11 we see Paul reflecting on these very distinctives concerning God’s righteousness. Because Israel had rejected the true hope of God—Jesus—Paul writes that God has “broken” or “torn” the branch of Israel from the tree of His grace; this is a display of the severity (or judgment) of His righteousness. Alongside this, we see the goodness of God’s righteousness in the grafting in of the Gentile believers. Paul writes that it is through God’s kindness and goodness that Gentile believers, who come from a wild, unkempt tree have now been grafted—meaning, God exercises His kindness toward the gentiles through salvation (grafting in)—into the cultivated tree of God’s grace. And thus we come to understand that the Goodness and Severity of God in Romans 11 is: *A display of God’s righteousness understood and applied.*

**Lesson Plan**

**Lesson Goal:** To understand the doctrine of God’s righteousness and see how it applies to the lives of His people

**Lesson Points:**

**1 - The Goodness of God in His righteousness**

**2 - The Severity of God in His righteousness**

**The Context:** At this point in Romans, Paul has explained man’s need for the gospel and God’s grace in providing the gospel. Now Paul reflects on Israel’s place in God’s redemptive plan since they have rejected this essential gospel. The reason we focus on this particular passage is because it clearly displays both components of God’s righteousness: His goodness and His severity.

**God’s Righteousness Defined:**

God possesses all of His attributes in perfect harmony and wholeness. One attribute is not distinct from another. But in theological study, God’s attributes are identified and distinguished for the sake of our own human understanding. It helps us to better understand and comprehend God’s beauty and glory. Thus, we understand and define God’s righteousness as, “God always acts in accordance with what is right and is Himself the standard of what is right.”[[1]](#footnote-0) Another helpful definition states, “God’s Righteousness is the form and structure of God’s goodness…”[[2]](#footnote-1) meaning that it is the way in which we experience God’s goodness toward us.

**Opening Question:** Have you ever considered that God possesses all of His attributes in perfect harmony: His mercy and His justice, His love and His wrath, and His goodness and His severity? Why is this good news? Why is this bad news?

**Point 1 - The Goodness of God in His righteousness**

How is God’s goodness seen in this passage? Note specifically vs. 18-19, 22, & 24.

JI Packer notes that God’s “goodness” is His quality of moral perfection;[[3]](#footnote-2) and in particular, it is through God’s *generosity* (a quality of His goodness) that we come to know His goodness and grace. Paul’s reflection in verse 18 perfectly makes the point. He writes, “*...remember it is not you who supports the root, but the root that supports you.*” We see, then, that salvation (God’s goodness) is not something that we take hold of or support on our own. Rather, we see God’s goodness in that He extends it to us and supports us in it.

Again, in verse 22 we note Paul’s wording, “...*God’s kindness toward you…*” Salvation from sin through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is God’s kindness toward His people. This is what Paul refers to in verse 24 when speaking of a wild olive branch grafted into a cultivated tree. We do not naturally grow up into God; our sin nature prevents that. Rather, through the gospel of God’s kindness, we are taken from the wilderness of sin and grafted into the maturity of God’s people.

What is the end result/ultimate goal of God’s goodness according to these verses?

As we noted above, the end result is the union with Christ and His people. But, we do not want to miss that this union comes only in and through God’s kindness. He has extended His generosity towards us because He is kind. He was under no mandate. Had he not extended salvation unto us, His kindness would not have been in any way diminished; but we see that God’s purpose in salvation was the uniting of a people to Himself through Jesus. And this is the goal of the exercising of His kindness.

How is this “grafting in” of the gentiles tied to God’s righteousness?

Paul does not spare the gentiles any criticism for he does not want them to forget the situation from which God saved them. He quite clearly says in verse 24 that apart from the gospel of God’s kindness, gentiles were growing from a wild, unkempt tree and were contrary to the order and peace of God. In other words, apart from Christ, gentiles were lovers of the world, haters of God, enslaved to sin, and without hope. Thus, when God exercises His kindness toward the gentiles through salvation (grafting in), He is displaying His righteousness through underserved kindness.

Consider this passage in light of Psalm 11. How does this Romans’ passage align with Psalm 11, specifically vs. 5-7?

In Romans 11 we see a display of God’s righteousness; the same righteousness that David reflects on in Psalm 11. In vs. 5-7 of Psalm 11, David notes that God is active in the lives of both the righteous and the wicked and that God loves the righteous. As we consider this alongside Romans 11, we see that it is only through the gospel of God’s kindness that men and women come to know God, to love His righteousness and to be loved of God. The gospel, then, is a deep and profound display of the kindness of God’s righteousness.

Optional: Consider also Psalm 107 on the goodness of God

**Transition Statement:** As we consider God’s goodness, we must also consider His severity; it is the like the other side of the same coin.

**Point 2 - The Severity of God in His righteousness**

Consider also from Psalm 11 that God’s righteousness has severity, “*...His soul hates the wicked…*” How do we see the severity of God’s righteousness in this Romans passage?

Consider vs. 17, 19, & 20-22.

By severity, we are referencing God’s just judgment on sin, both now and eternally in hell. Speaking of Rm. 11:22 Packer notes, “The word Paul uses...means literally ‘cutting off”; it denotes God’s decisive withdrawal of His goodness from those who have spurned it.”[[4]](#footnote-3) We are reminded through these verses of what God said Moses in Ex. 34:6-7. In this Old Testament text, God affirms His grace and mercy, but also the severity of His wrath against unrighteousness.

Thus, in the verses of our Romans 11 passage, we read about God breaking off the unrighteous branch of Israel because Israel rejected God.[[5]](#footnote-4) God’s righteousness bears its severity against unrighteousness.

What is the ultimate goal of the severity of God’s righteousness according to vs. 23-24?

We see that the severity of God’s righteousness is not fatalistic; God is not simply punishing people for fun. Paul leads us to see, rather, that the severity of God’s righteousness, presently, is meant to lead sinners to repentance and restoration. Ultimately, God’s severity will be justly poured out eternally against those who reject Him; but for now, His severity against sin is meant to lead/shepherd men and women toward Him.

How then does Romans 11:17-24 help us better understand Psalm 11?

In Psalm 11, David reflects on God’s righteousness, both His goodness and severity. Romans 11 gives us a picture of the outworking of David’s meditation. David states that God hates the wicked, but what does “God’s soul hating the wicked” look like? Paul helps us to understand this: His severity leads to the breaking of the branch; He removed His holy kindness. His judgment on sin is severe and just.

A note on the security of salvation: It would be easy for some people to feel uneasy about salvation at this point, especially when talking about God breaking off a branch due to unrighteousness. It is important to make the distinction that God dealt with Israel differently than He now deals with the Church: This difference is the cross of Christ. Whereas Israel was expected to obey the Law and relate to God through the Law, we now see that the Law was fulfilled in Christ (Mt. 5:17) and that through Jesus we approach God in confidence (Heb. 4:16).

**The Big Picture: Seeing Jesus**

We would be amiss if we did not ask, “Where is Jesus in all of this?” We cannot fully understand the goodness and severity of God’s righteousness apart from Jesus and the cross. *You see, it was to satisfy both His goodness and severity that God sent Jesus to the cross.* Through His sacrificial death Jesus took sin upon Himself and bore out the full measure of God’s severity against it; and having exhausted it, He committed Himself to the Father and died. And having exhausted God’s severity against sin, God raised Jesus to life in order to show His goodness and the hope of the gospel.

We must recognize that for those who do not know Jesus through the gospel, or for those who have rejected His gospel, these people remain under the severity of God’s righteousness. And this is why we must be diligent to take the gospel to these people; the people who live next door and the people who live across the globe. It is sin that God hates, and apart from Christ, we all stand rightfully guilty in our sin.

We see the hope of the gospel in the righteousness of God. Why does David take refuge in God? Because He is the only refuge. Why is it good news that God is in His holy temple? Because His eyes are on His children, and they are His children because of His goodness and kindness. And so with David, we say, “*For the Lord is righteous; He loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold His face.*” And so the righteous shall...

**Application Questions**

* How am I recognizing God’s goodness towards me?
* How has God been good to my family?
* How am I leading my family to love and cherish God’s goodness?
* Knowing that God’s severity is meant to lead sinners to repentance, how am I responding to this truth about God?

An old Scottish Prayer from Psalm 11: “O Lord Who art the strength and stay of Thy poor flock, although the wicked world goes about to snare us; and seeing that there is no way for us to escape, but only by Thy grace; grant that we may continue in Thy fear and truth, and that we be not involved in that vengeance and punishment which Thou wilt pour forth upon the wicked, when Thou shalt send that great Judge, Christ Jesus the Son, to judge the whole world. Amen.”

1. Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 93-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 446-447. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. JI Packer, *Knowing God,* 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. *Knowing God*, 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Our intent here is not to discuss the ultimate purpose of Israel in God’s plan, only to discuss the text of Romans 11 itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)