

"I Myself Am..." – Identity and Grace

Thomas Robinson, *God's Amazing Paths 5*, October 23, 2016

Romans 10:18-11:6

¹⁶ But they have **not all obeyed** the **good news**. For Isaiah says, "*Lord, who has **believed the report heard from us?***" [Isa 53:1] ¹⁷ So **believing** is from a **report heard**, and the **report** is through a **word of Messiah**.

¹⁸ But I ask, have they not **heard**? Indeed they have:

*"Into **all the earth** their sound went forth,
and to the **ends of the inhabited world** their words."* [Psa 19:4]

¹⁹ But I ask, did **Israel** not **understand**? It's Moses who first says,

*"I'll provoke you to jealousy over a **non-nation**;
with a **foolish nation** I'll make you angry."* [Deut 32:21]

²⁰ Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,

*"I was **found** by those **not seeking for me**;
I became **manifest** to those **not asking for me**."* [Isa 65:1]

²¹ But about Israel he says,

*"All day long I stretched out my hands
to a **people disobedient and contrary**."* [Isa 65:2]

11:¹ I ask, then, *has God rejected his people?* [1Sam 12:22]

By no means! For **I myself am an Israelite**, from seed of **Abraham**, of the tribe of **Benjamin**. ² God has not rejected **his people** whom he foreknew.

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.*" [1 Kg 19:10]

⁴ But what is God's reply to him?

"I have kept for myself 7,000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." [1 Kg 19:18]

⁵ So too at the **present time** there is a **remnant**, according to a **choice** created by **grace**. ⁶ But if it's by **grace**, it's no longer on the basis of **works**; otherwise **grace** would no longer be **grace**.

Mark 8:34

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, Jesus said to them, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

Philippians 3:4-9a

If anyone else thinks they have reason for confidence in flesh, I have more: ⁵ as to circumcision, an "eighth-dayer," from the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to Law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness in Law, blameless.

⁷ But whatever gains I had, I have considered as a loss because of the Messiah. ⁸ And what is more, I consider everything as a loss because of the surpassing value of the knowledge of Messiah Jesus my Lord. Because of him I have forfeited all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may have the Messiah as my gain ⁹ and be found in him

Galatians 1:13-16

¹³ For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, that I intensely persecuted the church of God and was destroying it. ¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, since I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. ¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone

Galatians 2:20

²⁰ I have been crucified with the Messiah. I myself no longer live, but Messiah lives in me. And what I am now living in flesh, I live in the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

2 Corinthians 5:14-17

¹⁴ For the Messiah's love urges us on, because we have come to this conviction: One has died for all, therefore all have died! ¹⁵ And he died for all, in order that those who live should no longer live only to themselves but in relation to him who died for them and was raised. ¹⁶ From now on, therefore, we don't understand anyone in a way limited to merely human flesh. Even though we once understood Messiah that way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Messiah, there's a new creation! The old has gone. Look, new things have come to be!

Communities of Identities – God's complex Creatures

We are finite beings, defined, limited. I'm the child of two parents, and theirs ... an ethnic descent, a gender. I'm from a location in place and time. I'm shaped by a family, society, culture, traditions, political possibilities, power structures (race, gender, money, etc.), history. I'm shaped by my own story, choices, relationships, actions, experiences, faith, beliefs, education, hopes, abilities, dreams.... It's a God-given complexity that makes every person distinct and interesting. A world of fascination and conflict. In communities we interact and shape each other's identities. Jews & Gentiles faced such conflict in Rome.

Paul is telling the event of Jesus, a very specific person in a limited time, place, history, faith, who sends a shock wave out into the world that can influence every human identity. God is working within human freedom and limitation. The story of Israel gives definition to Jesus – Exodus, Messiah, Lord, suffering servant, Spirit, resurrection, redemption, etc.

But the event of Jesus, fills up and stamps that story with a surprising character. It is not just for Israel, but for all nations and peoples, even those ignorant of Israel's covenants. All kinds of identities can be drawn into a transformed identity as God's beloved children.

“Has God Rejected His People?” – God's vast Plans

Paul knows the “Good News” of Jesus as crucified Messiah open to all people is not anything he as a Jew had wanted to hear as he defined his own faith identity in a Roman world. But he looked at scripture again and found pointers to God's intent throughout the texts.

He faces the painful question: Does all this mean rejection? He reshapes Samuel's assurance when his ancestor Saul was anointed king of Israel. Paul's answer is an emphatic No...but! God has certainly not rejected his people. The first generations of believers were Jews, including Paul! But just as emphatically God is doing something unexpected. Just as in Elijah's day God was doing something bigger than even the great prophet could see.

The Grace that marked the twists of God's choices in Israel's ethnic story, was the real purpose of God, not just a highlight. Jesus was the explosion of that Grace for the whole world.

An Identity of Grace in a Grace-Blind World

God the creator comes in his unique way in Jesus, son of God, suffering servant! He creates something new, fulfills Israel's promises but also touches the identity of every human at the deep level of life, death, fear and hope. His grace opens a new level of reality, a new possibility for all. That event of grace questions who I am! Can I see myself in a new story of life I never imagined. I resist, ok with my old brokenness and fears. Or does Grace choose?

We see only a remnant, as in Rome. But God's grace has universal reach, even to broken me!

I can be in Christ, living with God's Spirit, seeing how my own identity grows into God's life!