

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Someone once said there will be three things that surprise us when we get to heaven: Who is there. Who isn't there. And that we are there. We're not in heaven yet, but we are here in church. Are you surprised that you're here? I'm guessing if I asked for a show of hands, few of you would raise them. Few are probably looking around wondering, "Wow, what am *I* doing here?" Unless you haven't been to church in a very long time, in which case, today's sermon is all about you. (Just kidding!)

This is a question I want all of us to think about. What are you doing here? What are you doing here in church today here at Good Shepherd? What's your story? There's the immediate story of the circumstances: "I'm here because I love the Lord and I rejoice when I get to go to the house of the Lord." That what everyone is saying, right? Maybe not. "Well, I always go to church on Sunday," might be a common answer. Or maybe being here today wasn't entirely your idea. "I'm here because a friend promised me brunch today." (That's fine... we're just glad you're here!) Or, "I'm here because my parents forced me to be here, or my husband/wife guilted me into being here." Again, if that's the case, I'm glad you're here and I pray that something in the service today will stick with you and you'll leave believing it was worth your time to be here today.

That's the immediate story. What's your life story as to why you are here today? For me, I can tell you that my parents are one of the main reasons I am here today. They considered church attendance a priority. The only time we ever missed a service was if it was terrible weather or if I was really sick. Otherwise we were always there. They taught me the truths of the Christian faith. They paid for Christian education so I would be well trained in the Bible. They modeled the Christian faith in our family. They made sure we had devotions most evenings. They were regular in prayer before every meal and before bed at night.

Maybe your story is like that... or maybe it's very different. Some of you may have come to faith as an adult. Maybe your primary reason is not your parents, but a friend or family member that loved you enough to bring you to church or tell you about Christ.

Maybe it was even some tragedy, or a difficult trial or a stressful situation that moved you to seek answers. So you went to church, and you discovered God's answers to your questions.

These are the immediate answers to the question: What you *you* doing here?

But to really answer that question, we need to go back even further. Why are any of us here? The Christian faith has its roots deep in Judaism... that is, the faith of a particular ethnic group called the Jews. They were all descendants of Abraham. God promised to that group that the Savior would come to them and through them. God gave his Law to the Jews through his servant Moses. The prophets were all Jewish. When the Savior finally came, he was born to a Jewess, and his stepfather was a Jew. Jesus spent the vast majority of his earthly ministry preaching to the Jewish people. And his death and resurrection took place in the capital city of Israel, Jerusalem.

I won't do this, but I think that if I took a show of hands how many of you here today are Jews, we would have very few hands go up. So my question again is: "What are *you* doing here?!"

And finally, there is one more reason to ask this question. Because the truth is everyone of us has fallen short of the expectations of our holy God. And even if you're not a Christian, I think I can say confidently that everyone here hasn't even lived up to their own expectations. God is holy and demands we be the same. God is perfect and he demands we be the same. When Adam and Eve failed God and rebelled against him, they hid from him! Yet here we are gathered in God's house by our own free will. "What in the world are we doing here?!"

By all rights, we should not be here in church today. So what are we doing here? I think this is important to answer, because it reveals to us something very important about our God. So let's answer the question by looking at Romans 11:11-24

Context: Paul has just gotten done making the point that unrepentant and unregenerate humans cannot reject God's grace without consequence. The people of Israel had every advantage. They had God's Word revealed through Moses and the prophets. They had the promise of the Savior. Then when the time had fully come, they had the actual Savior living and teaching and doing miracles among them. But they turned after other gods. They lived in rebellion and disobedience. Their rejection had serious consequences. And it's part of the answer to the question: What are *you* doing here?

Romans 11:11-24 Ingrafted Branches

11 Again I ask: Did they [the Jews] 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 [jealous].

It was a sinful, terrible thing that Israel rejected God's salvation in Christ Jesus. But here is one of the things that makes our God amazing, He takes such a thing and still turns it into a blessing. There were two blessings that God brought out of Israel's sin of rejection.

First, the message of salvation was shared with the Gentiles. See **Act 13:44-46 44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. 45 When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. 46 Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles."** This was a pattern that repeated again and again. What a horrible thing that the Jews rejected Christ! What a wonderful thing that the Gentiles heard the Gospel and were saved.

This is how Paul describes the second blessing. Jesus came from the Jews, and was the Savior promised to the Jews. But they weren't interested. They met Jesus with either indifference or hostile rejection. So God took the message of full and free forgiveness through Christ to the Gentiles. And they loved it. They rejoiced in it! It was changing people lives. And Paul hoped this would cause jealousy to arise in his own people, so they would take a second look at what they discarded and so be saved.

As a father of six, I've seen this happen more than once. One child picks up a toy, isn't that interested and puts it down. Child two comes up and picks it up and finds it very interesting and fun. Child one suddenly cries out, "Hey, I was playing with that! They want it back now that they see the enjoyment the other is getting from it.

Or when you're at a garage sale, you pass right by something, but then someone else picks it up and is really looking it over. Suddenly, you decide that item is worth a second look.

You are here because God's chosen people rejected the Savior. The message then went to all people. You are here because God turned something tragic and evil into a blessing for you and me.

You are here because through your peace, through your life, through your joy... through the light that you let shine in this dark world... God wants to draw others to himself, both Jew and Gentile.

12 But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring!

Paul can't help but imagine. If God is able to bring these blessings when Israel was sinfully rejecting Christ. How many more blessings would God be able to bring if Israel believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and was saved!

13 I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry 14 in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them. [Paul knows the Old Testament prophecies that only a remnant will be saved. He loves his people so much, though, that he will rejoice if just some are saved. Some is way better than none.] **15 For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead? 16 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.**

The firstfruit gifts and the roots: a reference to Abraham and the patriarchs. Because the roots were good there is still hope for the tree, he figures. Continuing the analogy, he talks about how the Gentiles fit in:

17 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, 18 do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. 19 You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in." 20 Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.

Roots: Patriarchs. Branches Jews. Many broken off. Others grafted in. Those others come from wild olive trees and grafted into the cultivated olive tree. *What are you doing here? Part of the reason is because of the Jews... that chosen nation through whom the words and promises of God were made and preserved. Through whom the Savior was born! We owe a debt of gratitude to God for the Jewish nation through whom God brought about his plan of salvation. John 4:22: Salvation is from the Jews. You gentiles are not contributors, but receivers. You are not the roots, but you benefit from the roots. Thank God for your Jewish roots!*

2) Consider the warning. God can break you off just as he did the unbelieving Jews.

22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. [Remember last week we talked about the tension in God? We see it clearly again here, don't we? God is stern yet God is kind.

Continue in that kindness, or you will lose it. Note that salvation is not found in Gentile merit, but in God's kindness.

23 And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. 24 After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature,

and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

What was keeping the Jews “broken off”? Not a lack of God’s kindness. He still wanted them to be saved. It was their unbelief that cut them off. God in his mercy still desires their salvation. And it’s easy for them to come back.

They have the Word of God. They’ve memorized it. Think of a structure that’s been built, but the front door is locked. The Jews were simply lacking the key. A

Bottom line: What are *you* doing here today? The answer to that question is this: God has guided human history so that by his grace you are where you are today. He planned in human history to send his Son who lived for you and died for you and lived again for you. He lived a holy life for you. He died on Calvary’s cross for all your sins. He lived again for you when he rose on Easter morning. What are you doing here? God loved you, he chose you, he saved you from your sins.

What are you doing *here*? God guided your personal history so that you would hear his saving Word and so that you would hear his life giving word as you are today.

Don’t take for granted that you are here! It’s not by chance. It’s by God’s Work. And be certain of this... in heaven one day you absolutely will *not* hear the question from God: “What are *you* doing here.” God knows you are there by his design, by his love, according to a plan invented before the creation of the universe. Rejoice! Amen.