

**Sermon Transcription • Romans 11:25-32****A Mystery Revealed****Pastor Ezra Okot**

**[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]**

Most of us have movies or sitcoms that we love and follow - so I'd like to ask you, think of right now, think of what's your favourite novel, story or movie? Just think of it - then ask yourself; let me ask you a second question, a follow up question - why is that novel, or that movie your favourite? Chances are there is a mystery that is beginning to unfold as you read the story, or as you engage the show. And there are this many plots and storylines in the story that are just creating a huge issue, and as you get into it, you wonder, my goodness, how - how are the characters here going to get away, how are they are going to get out of this issue, of this tragedy or struggle. How are they going to solve the problem. And then at the end of the story, when you see the reveal, you would think to yourself, "My goodness, I never would have thought in a million years that the story would end this way - what a remarkable story!" And you'd go and you'd share it with your friends and you tell your co-workers, if it is a sitcom you are watching on TV, you'd be telling people, "You got to watch this show, you got to watch 24, man the cliffhangers are ridiculous." Right, you'd be telling your people to watch this show. Now if it's a really good story, once the mystery is solved and it just leaves you there with your mouth open, shocked, it tells you something about the author doesn't it. Like what a brilliant author, to actually stitch all these storylines and bring everything together beautifully in a beautiful whole that's the end of the story, you'll just say, "Wow what an amazing author."

See this is what we're going to learn about God in this passage. God is this author and he will bring something together in a beautiful way. What is he going to bring in a beautiful way? Well, Paul has been talking about the gospel and how the gospel is awesome, and the gospel is great, and they're all these promises that we see in the gospel of Jesus Christ - and that is all well and good and fine, but the audience that Paul is writing to, they're still thinking in their minds, "But what do you do with the forever and ever promises that God gave to the nation of Israel? What do you do with those?" Do they just go away, what will God do with the people of Israel whom he said, "I will be your God and you'll be my people forever." What will God do with them, do these promises just disappear? Does God decide, "Hey, we're going to press the reset button and start over. Because obviously my plan with the Jews didn't work. So let's try plan B." Is there plan B here, or do these forever and ever promises still stand? That's what we want to find out today. So this is what we're going to do. We're going to do a Bible study, we'll pretend that we're all one big community group study, Bible study okay. So you'll need your Bible, you need it open because we will go through verses here and I'll show you why I'm saying what I'm saying as we read through this text. And then after we have studied and understood



the passage, we will consider four things that we learn about God from this story. Okay? So we'll read the passage, explain it as we read and then, four things that we learn from this text.

### **[Read the Text]**

So let's read Romans 11:25, and I'll be stopping along the way explaining a few things to just bring it together for us to understand properly. Paul says here,

"I do not want you [Who's the you there - the you are Gentiles. Now he's writing to a church and it's predominantly addressing Gentiles here. I don't want you] to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: [Let's just pause there, so he doesn't want them to be ignorant of a mystery. Because ignorance of this mystery - yeah you guys may be very proud, so he doesn't want these Gentiles to be proud. So what's the mystery?] Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved."

So he's saying, Israel has experienced a hardening. What's that mean there? In other words, Israel will be dull towards the gospel. They will not feel like a passion for it. They will not really see it clearly. They will not want to embrace the gospel. So there is a partial hardening. So there's a time limit to this indifference to the gospel on the part of the nation of Israel. And this indifference will remain in place until, he will say, the full number of Gentiles has come in. So in other words in God's economy, there will be a time; there is a number of Gentiles who have to become Christians, so they're coming into the family of God. So there's a full number, so when the very last one becomes a Christian, this partial hardening will end and at that point, he says "And in this way, all Israel will be saved." So question - what is, all, there? Is it, all, every single one? Or is it, all, meaning you know, all of Canada in 2010 saw Sidney Crosby score the winning goal and beat those Americans. All of Canada! All of Canada? Every single one? Or was it a majority of Canada? We would say it was the big number of Canadians watched that game, but not every single one. So, all, there is not all meaning all without exception there. So there's a big number of Israel will be saved. Hmm, so does it mean that Israel, throughout the ages - like every single, or a big number of Jews through the ages will become Christians? What is Paul saying? He doesn't end there - we are still doing Bible study, keep reading. Romans 11:26-27,

"As it is written: [Now he's quoting Isaiah 59:20-21, and Isaiah 27:9. He says this, As it is written] 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.'"

So there is the deliverer who will come from Zion. So what is Paul saying here? This deliverer will come and he will turn godlessness away. So the deliverer is the one doing the saving - the turning away from godlessness, he's turning the Jews from godlessness. So what does Paul saying here? They're multiple ways of interpreting this text. And many theologians have interpreted differently - I'll give you three. So pay attention. The first, there are those who will say, that, all Israel, mentioned in verse 26 - all Israel being saved; this, all Israel, means Israel, people of God. So when you become a



child of God, then the Scriptures will kind of label you, you are now Israel. You're the true Israel. You're the chosen ones, the people of God. So this means you have the ethnic Jew who says yes to Jesus and becomes a Christian and you also have a Gentile who will say yes to Jesus and come to saving faith. These two groups of people are now the true Israel, and these interpreters would say that's the all Israel mentioned in verse 26 - Jew and Gentile coming together that's the, all Israel, mentioned here. That's one way of interpreting this text.

Then they're others who will say, "No, no, no, no, it has nothing to do with Gentiles but it has everything to do with the ethnic Jew." So they will argue there is the nation of Israel, national Israel, a majority of national Israelis are not Christians. They will say, "No, no, no, no, no they don't want the gospel at all. They want to follow Judaism." But then there is a remnant, a small group within the nation of Israel, ethnic Israelis who will come to saving faith - ethnic Jews who will come to saving faith. In the same we would say Canada is a wonderful nation, be a ton of people in Canada 30 or 40 million of us, whatever the number is, but then not all Canadians are Christian, but in Canada there is a small group of people within the population of Canada who are Christians. There's a small group. So that small group is what we're going to call the remnant. So all Canadians, a majority of them not Christian, there's a small group though - so through the generations, through the history of this nation generation after generation, many people not Christian, a few were. So through the history of Canada there's a small remnant who are saved. So they'll argue - the people who argue for the second point, will be - hey this remnant of Israel, through the centuries, these ones are the ones Paul is referring to as, all Israel will be saved. The remnant will keep being saved through the centuries until Christ comes back. That's the second view.

The third view which I mostly find appealing, one that I would say I subscribe to - would be this one. There will be a day, there will be a day when there will be an extraordinary, great, national, conversion of Israel. There will be a great extraordinary national conversion of Israel, this is what Paul is saying here. Where all Israel, not every single one without exception, but a huge majority of them, at a specific time in history. So this means - we are not saying, all Jews throughout all ages, throughout all of human history - we are not saying that. We are saying, in a specific time, in a specific time there will be a great extraordinary, national conversion of the nation of Israel. Why do I say that? We are still doing Bible study are we not? So look at the verse. Romans 11:25, Paul will say, "Israel has experienced a hardening in part," which Israel is this? Is this Israel - national Israel? Is this Israel - remnant Israel? Is this Israel - Israel, Jew and Gentile? This would be national Israel - they're experiencing a partial hardness, a deadness to the gospel. They're not open or warm to the gospel. So this is the Israel here in verse 25.

"Israel [national Israel] has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles [There's a distinction - Jews and Gentiles. So we know Gentiles are not included in this hardened Israel. They're not there. Why? Because a full number of Gentiles] has come in, [so national Israel there, verse 26] and in this way *all Israel* will be saved."

So where in those two verses was there a change in the identity of the Israel that Paul is referring to here. There is no change in the identity of the Israel he's talking about here. It's the same group of people. The hardened ones have been hardened in part, national Israel, Gentiles will come in full



number, and then this hardened ones will now, all will be saved. A big number of them will be saved. So national Israel. So that is argument number one to say this is probably national Israel.

Second argument, we would say look at Romans 11:26,

“As it is written: [this is Isaiah’s prophecy] ‘The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.’”

He doesn’t say from Israel, from Jacob. So why Jacob? Jacob was a true Jew. No Gentile in his blood. And all his sons - Jews, no Gentile there. So the deliverer will come and take away godlessness from *ethnic* Jews. Second argument why this could possibly be, Paul is referring to national Israel here.

Third argument, you will want to look at Romans 11:28,

“As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake.”

Who’s they? Who’s the enemy for your sake when it comes to the gospel? Ethnic Israel, they’re the ones who are hardened in part. So they are enemies for your sake. Who’s your there? Gentiles. Romans 11: 28,

“But as far as election is concerned, they [same group] are loved on account of the patriarchs.”

The patriarchs are Isaac ... Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. So who was loved because of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob - ethnic Israel. So in other words what Paul is saying here, what I think he’s saying is Israel has experienced a deadness to the gospel right now. A partial deadness until, so there’s a time limit, until the full number of the Gentiles comes in - the very last to be saved. And then at that point in this way, all Israel, national Israel, will be saved. This is what I believe the text is teaching. So why would God do it this way? Look at Romans 11:28-29 again,

“As far as the gospel is concerned, they [Israel, national] are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.”

God will not revoke his promises to these people. God will not take back his gifts, God will not take back his called. But what’s interesting here is he says, as far as the gospel is concerned they are enemies for your sake. What is he talking about there? How are they enemies for your sake? Here’s how, this is what he means. So imagine if Paul was coming to preach the gospel during his time, he’s coming here in Abbotsford to preach the gospel here, so what happened? He would get to Abbotsford and the first thing he’d be looking for is a synagogue where the Jews gather to worship. And so he’d go to the synagogue and then he’d begin to preach the gospel in the synagogue. What did the Jews do if you’re familiar with the book of Acts, they ran him out of town. Go chase him away, he’s not in town. So they’d chase him away, they don’t want anything to do with the gospel. And so what did he do? He left the synagogue and went to the street corner and began to preach the gospel to the Gentile, and so the Gentile heard the gospel and came to saving faith. And he’d move to another town, he’d go to Langley, again going to the synagogue - the Jews chase him out. And so he goes to the market place, begins to share the gospel, the Gentiles say, yes, and they come to saving faith. He does the same thing in Surrey, and in Vancouver and he went on and on and on. In other words - God



in his wisdom knew, this is the gospel and I want the Jew and Gentile alike to receive the gospel. But the only way the Gentile will receive the gospel is if the Jew - I still leave them in their deadness, I still leave them in their hardened state. So when Paul comes to the Jew they will not receive and that will compel Paul to turn and go to the Gentile and the Gentile will hear the gospel and get saved because if the Jew was not hardened, Paul would not go to the Gentile. Make no mistake folks - if the Jews had said yes and they were warm to the gospel, you and I would not be here. Why? Most of us are Gentiles. We are Gentiles, most of are and we may never have interacted with the gospel. So God in his sovereign way decided to structure it this way. That the Gentile will also come in and receive this gift of salvation and hear the good news of Christ - but he doesn't end there. Romans 11:30-32,

“Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God [Gentile, disobedient] have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience [we know what that means], so they [the Jews, they] too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God’s mercy to you. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.”

Now that verse is a little bit of a mouthful, but let me give you an image that will probably clean it up a little bit. So I want you to imagine that you’re a parent and you have two boys, Jeff and Ezra. [Laughter] Okay - so you have Jeff and Ezra as children, now we are close to Christmas, so you’re buying Christmas gifts for your two boys. So you buy this same gift, you wrap these two gifts separately and then on Christmas morning or Christmas Eve you call your firstborn son Jeffrey, “Jeffrey honey, Jeffrey, come, come, come!” And he comes the way he comes and there he is [laughing]. So you give Jeff this gift and you give him a card attached to this gift. So Jeff grabs the gift and he looks at the card, he tears it, he doesn’t even care about the card and he just tosses it. He opens the gift and there is a car, a toy car. So he looks at this toy car, he flips it over, he looks at it, he’s playing with it; you know Jeff is so not good with stuff that he has to use his hands with. So he’s hopeless, so he’s trying to play with this toy, it’s kind of boring and so what does he do? “Mommy! Is there anything else that you have for me? Dad, is there anything else?” And he’s saying, “No honey, this is your gift.”

“Ah it’s boring!” And then he walks away to the kitchen to look for something to eat or whatever. So you look at him go, alright, so you take this other gift and you see, Ezra. “Oh Ezzie, come! Oh you’re so handsome! [Laughter] Oh Ezra come here.” And so Ezra comes and you give him his gift and he takes his card and he opens it and he reads the whole card, “Thank you Mom and Dad!” He puts it down, takes the thing, opens the gift nicely and then he removes the toy. “Oh it’s a car!” And he opens, “Oh the doors can open, and it has a little steering wheel in it, so it can move the wheels back and forth. Oh does the hood open? Yes it does, the trunk, oh it does open. What a nice car.” Ezra is riding the car, oh he realizes he can back it up and then let it and shoot forward. So now Ezra is now enjoying his toy while Jeff is busy finishing the cookies in the kitchen. [Laughter] And then Jeff sees Ezra playing with the toy, he comes into the living room, sees Ezra enjoying the toy and he’s like, “Oh the doors open? And the trunk and hood? Oh I want it, I want it I want it!” Jeff is whining, as he usually does. So what just happened to Jeff? He got the same toy - he was indifferent to it. Now he has seen Ezra enjoying the toy - he wants it. What’s happening here?



You see this is an image that shows what's happening with the nation of Israel. Where this partial hardening, this indifference to the gospel, they have walked away from it. So God in his wisdom has turned to the Gentiles, extended the gospel to the Gentiles. The Gentiles see the gospel and they come to saving faith. And they begin to enjoy the gospel and experience God's grace - constant grace that he gives to his people and so once the last Gentile comes in, this partial hardening will lift and the deliverer will come and turn the hearts of the Jew. He will turn godlessness away from them. And he will take away their sin and how is he doing it? Because now the Jew will see the Gentile enjoying salvation and they will say, "Oh we want it!" And the the only way for them to get it is to come to Jesus. And they will receive this same gift the same way you as a parent will look at Jeff, "Yes son, I love you too." And you'll extend the same gift to him that he can enjoy too. God in his wisdom did it this way, God in his wisdom put this mystery, to say, "Hey I still remember my forever and ever promises to the nation of Israel. I did not forget them." Theirs is just a partial hardening, but make no mistake, a deliverer will come.

So the question is who is the deliverer you may say, who is the deliverer? Well this deliverer we could guess that it's Jesus right? Yeah but we are doing Bible study, we don't like guessing when we're doing Bible study. We have to have fact, so 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, Paul is talking to the people in Thessalonica, it's a church in the first century. And as he's talking to them, he's saying, "Hey I have heard your reports about your guys. You received us there, we came to your town, we preached the gospel, you were warm to it, you said yes to Jesus. So we're so thrilled about the reports we're receiving and some of the things we are hearing is how you turned, I'm reading now 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10,

"How you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and [verse 10] to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he [God] raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

Who delivers from the wrath that is to come. Paul identifies who the deliverer is in 1 Thessalonians 1:10. The deliverer is Christ, and he's the one who will turn godlessness away from the nation of Israel and draw them in. One day, one day God will do it. So we'll say when? When does God do this, you may ask? The Scriptures don't say but there's some tell tale signs here, Jesus came, Isaiah is the one who said, "Hey the deliverer will come." So Jesus came, his first coming. Was godlessness chased away from the nation of Israel when Christ came the first time? No, they crucified him, Christ was crucified as the Scriptures teach. He will come and he will die. So when else will this deliverer come from Zion, Zion being heaven. When will he come again? Obviously the second coming. So could it be then God in his wisdom will turn his people and keep the promises he made to Israel at the second coming, when Christ comes back again, that's the time when the Jew will see, the Gentiles enjoying and receiving what is theirs and they will come and say, "Lord we want too." And God will not turn them away - and called them to come. So we're not saying Jews throughout human history. No those who were there at a specific time, Canadians, since Canada was formed there were many who never saw Sidney Crosby's goal, but we did. Because we live in this particular time, so we got to see that and enjoy the joy of winning an Olympic gold medal in our land. So we got to enjoy, we in this time. Same thing, the Jews, those who will live at that time, those ones - a good majority of them. God will turn them away from godlessness in keeping with the covenant he made with this people. What a



remarkable history. That's why Paul, next week, you will hear Jeff preaching saying, "Hey oh the depths and of the riches of the wisdom of knowledge of God. Who would have planned it that way?" That the Gentile would come in and then the Jew; only God.

## **[4 Things We Learn About God]**

### **1. God is a Kind Dad**

So question, what do we learn about God? Four things, you'll have to listen quickly because I'll talk fast. Number one - what we learn about God - God is kind dad. He's such a kind dad. The Gentiles were disobedient - rebels, the Jews - rebels. And yet God loved them both, cared for both of them - wanted the gospel to go to both of them. Imagine if, in your home you have someone living in your house, created in your image and likeness - this person is your son or daughter. You provide for them, you buy food for them, you fill the tank in your car if they're old enough to drive - they drive your car using your gas and they don't fill the tank. They eat your food, they're constantly on internet that you pay, because heaven forbid, that there's no internet in your house. [Laughter] So they enjoy all these privileges of living in your house. And yet they are as defiant as it gets. "You will not tell me how to live my life." And you're trying to talk to them saying, "But honey this is - don't hang out with these friends, we want you home at this time, what do you want to do with your life?" And they're busy looking at their nails and twirling their hair and waiting for you to finish and, "Like come on, don't bother me!" [Laughter] Now, really?! Some of you have kids like this in your homes right. That's why you're laughing. So what if it was your friend who had a child like this? What if it is your friend who had a child like this, and this friend was just bearing their soul to you at Starbucks, telling you, "You know this is my son and this is what's going on; this is my daughter, this what's going on." What would you tell a friend to do with their child? You'd probably tell your friend, "You know what, kick them out of the house. Have nothing to do with them."

Question - is this what God did with you? Is this what God did with you? If you were God would you choose you? If you were God would you continue loving you? Would you? Your prayerlessness - when was the last time you read your Bible? When was the last time you really prayed and sought God? What did you watch last night? Was it something that would edify you, glorify God? Yet God continues to show you his grace. He's a kind dad isn't he? He loves rebels like us - he loves rebels like us. We would never have chosen ourselves, but he continues to love us, doesn't he. He is a kind father, he keeps his promises to the nation of Israel, and he will. He loved the Gentile who was so godless; continued to pursue him and her, to draw him to the family. God is a kind father.

### **2. God Wants His Kids to Get Along.**

Second, God wants his kids to get along; God wants his kids to get along. Now in this church, in the first century Rome, in this Christian church, this church was founded by some Jews - some Christian Jews, who had come to saving faith. But then Claudius, the emperor came and issued an edict to evict all Jews away from Rome. "So Jews get out!" So all Jews left, so this church was left in the hands of Romans Christians and so it began to grow, it began to grow, when Claudius died that edict was repealed and so Jews came back and those who were Christian went back to church and they found these churches predominantly Roman. So now there was some ethnic tensions or should I say racial



tensions - why? Because the Jews would worship God differently from the Romans. It's the same way Africans might find a service like ours boring - we don't sing enough, we don't dance enough. Romanians will find our services are too short, why? Because their service is three hours long. So they worship differently - Jews and Gentiles worship differently. So Paul is writing saying, "Hey we don't want you to be conceited, don't be ignorant, don't want pride there." There's a racial tension there. So you may say, "Hey but there's no racial tension among us." Really?

So Jeff and I travelled to Atlanta and we go to Atlanta for a theological conference a number of years ago. And so while we're there walking around - Jeff and I goof a lot, like we really just get on each other's nerves, it's so much fun, it's amazing that we still care for each other. Anyway but as we travelled together, most of the time we don't rent cars, we just love jumping onto the buses and trains and things to see the area. And people just kept giving us a stink eye, and what, why ... why are people looking at us funny. Is it that we are crazy, yeah I know Jeff is a little gangster looking, [laughter] but like you know why are people looking at us funny. So Jeff told me, "Hey you know Ezra we're in the South. And in the South, a black guy and a white dude don't hang out together. They are not as free with each other, at least not in public." Now you may say, "Hey you know, but that is racism in the States, we don't have that in Canada." Are you kidding me?

Well my wife worked at the mall here, and she worked in one of the stores, one of the retail stores here. And there was this customer who was a good customer, came bought a lot of stuff but also got to know a lot of people who worked there. So he would just stop by, not that he's buying anything, just to check up on people, how are you doing, that kind of thing. So one day he walks in with his heart heavy. "Oh man, I am so distressed today?"

"Why?"

"My friend is just in a difficult situation."

"What's going on with your friend?" And the people are thinking man, you know is it that your friend is an accident like what's going on?

"Well my friend, his daughter, his daughter is marrying a black guy."

"Oh - is something wrong?"

"Oh man, you can't do that. Like you just stick to your race, like why would you want to marry a black person. Like why?" So one of the workers said, "Oh but Tamara here is married to a black guy." And so you would think, a normal person would realize my foot is in my mouth, down my throat, it's time to remove it and kind of like just walk away right? No he pushed the issue, he forced the issue. What did he say? He said, "Oh come on honey, like seriously? Like why would you do that? Have you seen a crow and a pigeon going?" Is what he said, and he was dead serious. And he kept making these comments, like totally serious. Why would you do this? Save yourself.

Now lest you think that those things don't happen in church, well I met a pastor a number of years ago - a good friend of mine. So we go out for coffee, Tim Hortons, we are busy talking about ministry and all that and then he told me, "Hey by the way, you know." So I asked him, "Hey what outreach efforts are you doing?"

"Ah, well you know we are trying but not really actively." Then I said, "Oh okay, but you have a lot of immigrants around you."



"Oh Ezra, let me tell you what. Well our church, we have this park that is next to our church and then this tabel where this East Indian men come and play cards - these older men they play cards in the park. Yeah so when the rains began to come in the Fall, they came to our church and they said, 'Hey, you know we know that this is a religious house, and you guys worship God here, so we kind of figured, would you give us a room - because if you came to our temple and wanted a little space where you can hang out, we'll create a space for you. So we kind of think, hey you know we're not here to do worship, or to bother you guys or anything, we just want a place where it's dry, it's clean, we can play cards because most of live around here.'" So the pastor said, "Well I went to my elders to ask them, the elders said 'We do not want people like *these* here.'"

Oh dear Christian, let's not pretend that there is no racism. It is here, and just because you haven't experienced it you ask a person of colour or an immigrant and they'll tell you. It is so here. But just because people of the world who are not alive to the gospel may have views like this, it should never happen in church - ever! Why? Because God wants his kids to live in harmony with one another. Because one day when Christ comes back again to make all things new, what will happen? Every tribe, tongue, colour, nation - will be gathered together singing praises to our King. *Every* nation, tribe, and tongue we will be singing to Christ - every single one of us, black, white, brown, whatever, all of us. It should never happen, it should never happen - we should be multiracial, multiracial in the church, why? Because that's what heaven will be like when Christ comes, make no mistake, that's what it will be like. God wants his kids to get along.

### **3. God Will Not Dupe You**

Third, God will not dupe you. God will not dupe you, God will keep his promises, God will keep his promises. I have a friend who his mother died and he was married, his marriage was not going well. His career, his career was not taking off and people around him, close loved ones were being diagnosed with cancer - things were just going haywire for my friend. And so he was so mad as a Christian. He was saying, "Hey I go to church, I give my tithe, I serve in church, I do all these things - go to community groups, the whole nine yards. I serve in church - why is God letting these things happen to me?" And he's mad, mad mad, mad.

"God loves you dude." "No he does not, because if he totally loved me things would go better," he says. "If God loved me it would have been better than this. He lied to me, he lied to me, I believed him, he lied to me. With my marriage he lied to me," he says. And some of us probably feel the same way. You pray, pray, pray and you don't feel God close to you. You feel like God has abandoned you because things are so hard for you. Let me say this straight. Please just lean in and listen to me closely. You're inability to sense God is not his issue, but yours. Your inability to sense God close to you is not his issue, but yours. Why? Because God said, I will never leave you nor forsake you - ever! I will never leave you nor forsake you. Nothing can separate you from the love of God, nothing. If God is for us, who can be against us. Just because we're going through difficulties and we have no idea how this story will come together does not mean that God left the town. God did not leave the house man. God is so with you. Who is sustaining you? He is, he is, God will not dupe you. He keeps his promises, and even though we don't know the end of the story yet, and how all this mess will come together.



Just because we don't know does not mean that God is not at work. He totally is at work, for the nation of Israel he will be.

#### 4. God Will Work Things Out

Finally, God will work things out. Do you like it when someone comes to you and things are not going well and they say, "Hey you know what don't worry it will all work out." Jeff likes telling me this, I don't like it but he keeps saying that. "It'll all work out. It'll work out don't worry about it." Why do we get so upset? Because we want control and we want to see it now, we want to see it now. It will all work out, it will all work out.

Well my first year in Canada as a student, and the Lord led me to give my money to my family because I was supporting my family and I was left with very little money between me and nothing. I had no plane ticket to go back home. And I remember days when I would buy a loaf of a bread, those days you'd buy a loaf of bread from Save-On-Food for 99 cents. And I would count the slices to know, this loaf would last me four, five days before it goes stale or moldy. And I would ration my food. If I came to someone's house, I knew that hey you know what that was the only time I'd have a balanced diet that week or that month. And I was like, "Surely Lord you're the one who told me to send all this money. What are you doing? What are you doing? Where are you?" And God was silent. And I was so faithless, I'd be walking downtown looking at people with their big nice cars and wishing, "I wish that guy was my dad, I wish that gal was my mom, I wish that guy was my sponsor - maybe things would work out." But God was silent. It ran up to this September when I began my first year in Canada - came in August. September, October, November, December I was left with a dollar and change in my pocket, no ticket to go back home, nothing. And I had settled in my mind. I'm going to go back to Vancouver and be a street person. Maybe go and beg Union Gospel Mission to probably put a little can there so that people, that well wishers could give a few coins so that enough money could be raised to buy me a ticket to go back to my Africa.

Last week before Christmas, and I had settled that this is what's going to happen. A preacher comes from Seattle, preaches in our chapel, he's done, students come they talk to him. I wanted to say thanks for preaching but so many students, so I went to the library. And then I just felt, go back again to say thanks to this guy. So I came I found two students they were done, I was the last guy. This guy grabs my hand, "Hey tell me your story."

"Hey I'm Ezra I'm from Africa," this and that, whatever. Ten minutes just him going back and forth with me. He's holding my hand, I'm like, give me my hand back he still has it. Anyway long story short he asks me, "So Ezra what is God taking you through." And I said, "Well I don't know how I'm going to pay my tuition. I'm an international student, but I trust God anyways," what I said, but in my mind, "Is God going to do it, is he really going to do it, I don't know." Well this guy said, "Ezra I'll surprise you. While I was driving from Seattle to come here, God pressed on my heart that there's a young man who has a need and pastor you are the one to meet his need. So he came to school he shook hands he forgot, he preached, totally forgot. He said, "Ezra the moment I held your hand, I knew it was you. So Ezra what's your need buddy." Then I said, "Well I guess my tuition for next semester." He said, "Don't worry about next semester, I'll pay your tuition, I'll pay your room and board, I'll buy your



clothes. I'll take care of you as though you were my son until you graduate." I wept. I had no idea how God is going to work it out, and through this man whom I had never met, he did.

I don't know about you, maybe you're in a situation how you don't know how it's going to work out. God is a God who is a master author, and your story will fit. It may not fit now, be patient and wait on him. Let's pray.

Father for your goodness we do want to thank you. We know that Father you're a God who's kind to your children. You're a God who wants your kids to get along and none of this racial nonsense that continues to plague our communities. Father these things should never happen in the body of Christ. Lord you never dupe anyone; you keep your promises at every turn even when we don't see and feel your presence Lord, you never left the house, you're always with us, and you're a God who will always work things out. Father you know the souls that are here and the burdens they bear. And so Father I pray, in Jesus name, would you grant your church faith, grant your people faith, to continue trusting in you even when they don't know where the next step, next meal, next solution will come from Father. I pray God would you work in your church in profound ways because you're a God who finishes the story beautifully for us as you will do for your promised Israel. We commit these things Father to you, show yourself faithful before us and grant us the ability to praise you forever. Commit these things Lord now to you, in Jesus name. And God's people said, Amen.