Tree, Fruit, and Branches

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[0:00] I'd like you guys to open up your copy of the scriptures to Romans chapter 11.

! We're in the middle of this chapter right now. We're going to look at what is a very interesting portion of Romans chapter 11 and try, if we can this morning, to clear a little bit of the fog away that sometimes creeps up around this passage and around us as we try to understand it.
Clear a little bit of that away so that we can be challenged this morning, maybe even rebuked and certainly encouraged by what God's word says. So we're going to start in verse 16 and read down to verse 24.
And I'd like you guys to stand in honor of God's word as we read together. The Apostle Paul writes in verse 16, If the dough offered as first fruits is holy, so is the whole lump.
And if the root is holy, so are the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot were grafted in among the others, now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches.
[1:22] If you are, remember it is not you who supports the root, but the root that supports you. Then you will say, branches were broken off that I might be grafted in. That is true.

They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will He spare you.
Note then the kindness and the severity of God, severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in His kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off.
And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree?
Father, as we wrestle this morning with this metaphor, I pray that You would give us understanding and that our hearts would swell with love for Christ, knowing that He has made it possible for us to share in the great blessings and promises of redemption found throughout the Scriptures.
[2:51] We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. I was at lunch one day this week. Nate and I were sort of laughing about, in a particular movie that we saw a while back, we were laughing about how there's a character in the movie who doesn't seem to understand common English expressions at all.

And so whenever you use an expression that taken literally is senseless, it's always senseless to him because he never could seem to grasp and understand the expressions that we use.
Because if you stop and think about it, language is weird. It's very strange. We use a lot of weird phrases all the time. We say things like, well, that just went right over his head. Meaning that he didn't understand it, but literally, what flew over the guy's head?
I don't know. We say these things all the time. We've had a lot of rain lately. We have a lot of expressions that surround weather. Like it's raining cats and dogs and things like that. We have all sorts of these expressions that really don't make any sense at all.
It's not just English either. It's virtually all languages that use words and phrases in ways that you can't follow their literal meaning. So once a week, I go to the kids' school, to Calvin and Eli's school, and I teach the Latin classes there every Tuesday.
[4:12] And Latin too has some of those weird phrases. And one of the phrases that they normally learn somewhere in the course of that is just how to say please. Just to say the word please.

But in Latin, there's no specific word for please. They use a phrase that if you translate it literally, it literally means, I will love you. So you say to somebody, could you move that book for me and I will love you.

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That's what you say. But if I tell a third grader that this particular two word expression means I love you, then first of all, they'll giggle, then they'll be grossed out, and they'll never want to ever say or write the phrase at all.
And so I don't ever tell them what it means literally. I just tell them, this means please. Because they can't handle the literal meaning of it. You know, when you're a third grade boy, you don't just go around saying to people, I love you.
Apparently that's not cool for third and fourth grade boys. So I just don't tell them anymore. Because that's just how language works. It's just weird. Things develop over time and certain words take on certain connotations and meanings and certain phrases take on certain meanings.
[5:17] And then the problem only grows larger when you have an entire metaphor where you don't just have a particular word that's not taken literally, but you have a whole sort of story or sentence that cannot possibly be taken literally.

And we have little short metaphors that we use all the time and sometimes we just make them up off the top of our head. You were probably taught when you were a kid and learning grammar that a simile is a comparison between two things that uses the word like or as.
So I could say Kip is as tall as a giraffe and everybody would go yeah Kip's a pretty tall guy. I mean that's why he has to sit in the back so the rest of us can see and all those sorts of things. He's a tall guy. But if you didn't know who Kip was and I said instead of saying that you just overheard me say yeah Kip is a giraffe.
You would think what kind of name is that for a giraffe? Who calls a giraffe Kip? And why is there a giraffe anywhere named Kip? Because it doesn't outside of context without knowing what it means metaphors don't make any sense at all.
And there are several times throughout the scriptures when we will find ourselves in the midst of an extended metaphor. And if you don't understand that metaphor in its context which is really the whole Bible then you can grow easily confused by the metaphor itself.
[6:33] And I think that's the case in the passage that we're looking at this morning. We find this extended metaphor that involves roots and a tree and two different kinds of branches in the middle of it.

And while you can grasp the general sense and the main point of the metaphor if you only read this particular paragraph you'll be better served if you pause to think about in the context of the whole Bible and of these chapters in Romans what do each of these parts of the metaphor what are they pointing us toward and what precisely do they represent.
And so this morning I want to do something very simple. I want us to walk through the four elements of this extended metaphor make sure we understand what they are and we'll work our way backwards through them we'll work our way from the branches down to the roots and then after we get to the roots then we'll come back and see the way in which Paul applies this going forward from the root back to the branches this morning.
So let's look at it. We do have those four elements. We have a root that he mentions several times and then a few times he mentions an olive tree so we know the root is the root of an olive tree and then upon the olive tree you have two different kinds of branches.
You have what Paul calls the natural branches and then you have what he calls the branches that come from the wild olive tree and are grafted into this cultivated olive tree this olive tree that would have been the kind that you would have had in your garden or near your house that you would have taken care of and made sure that it produced fruit.
[8:05] So we have the two branches that we're going to begin with. The natural branches and then what we'll simply call the wild branches for shorthand. So let's take a look real quickly and see what Paul has to say about the natural branches.

He mentions them in verse 21. He says if God did not spare the natural branches neither will he spare you.
And then if you move down further throughout you see these branches again in verse 24. If you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree how much more will these the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?
So we have these two branches that are very distinct from one another the natural branches and the wild branches. The natural branches in the context of this paragraph and in the context of Romans 9-11 very clearly very obviously are a reference to the Jewish people.

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To individual Jews to physical descendants of Abraham to those whom Paul calls throughout here he calls them his kinsmen according to the flesh his fellow Jews.
[9:16] So the natural branches are simply Jewish people who in the face of a failure to trust in Christ have been broken off of taken off of the olive tree itself.

And then of course the wild olive branches refer to Gentile believers to Gentiles who have now been taken from what was once a wild olive tree that is to say we were lost.
We were cut off from the nourishment that comes from the roots of this particular cultivated olive tree. We were wild. We didn't have any hope. We would never produce any real fruit. And God has taken some of the branches off of the wild olive tree.
He has taken some Gentiles and he has grafted them onto the cultivated olive tree. So we have Jews the natural branches being broken off and then Gentiles the wild branches being grafted into the tree.
Now for those of you who don't know anything about gardening and farming one of the things that you need to know that is very common among farmers is that they will often take parts of different kinds of similar fruit trees and they will graft branches in to one as opposed to another.
[10:26] So for instance if you had two types of orange trees perhaps one orange tree grew very large and produced a lot of fruit but the fruit was bitter and not good to be used for much at all but you had another orange tree that was capable of producing this delicious sweet tasteful oranges and yet didn't produce a lot of them it would not be uncommon to take a portion a branch off of the olive tree that produced the sweet fruit and grafted into the other or vice versa depending upon what the farmer determines is best in order to produce the largest amount of the sweet crop of oranges.

So there's been and this has gone on for centuries and centuries farmers have been able to mix and graft in parts of one plant into another plant to produce a greater crop and that's the metaphor that Paul is using.
He is saying there is a great cultivated olive tree that produces ready to produce fruit. And yet some of the branches have been broken off some of the individual Jews who were a part of that have been broken off and now Gentiles have been grafted in.
So what's essential for us to understand this metaphor is for us to understand exactly what the tree is. We know the branches are individual Jews and individual Gentiles but what exactly is the tree? What does the olive tree stand for? And we don't have to guess. We don't have to try to figure that out for ourselves because in the Old Testament the prophets used the figure of the olive tree to represent the nation of Israel.
[12:00] In fact, I want to show you somewhere where that happens. Hold your place in Romans chapter 11 and turn all the way back to the book of Jeremiah. Turn back to Jeremiah chapter 11. If you don't get there in time the words will be on the screen.

But in Jeremiah chapter 11 verse 16 God says something that sounds very, very similar to Paul's language in Romans 11. It's almost striking.
He says in verse 16 The Lord once called you a green olive tree. Now he's speaking directly to the nation of Israel. He once called you a green olive tree beautiful with good fruit but with the roar of a great tempest he will set it to fire and its branches will be consumed.
The Lord of hosts who planted you has decreed disaster against you because of the evil that the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done provoking me to anger by making offerings to Baal.
So that the olive tree in Jeremiah is clearly the nation of Israel and yet God is ready and willing to come in judgment upon the nation of Israel when they wander off into idolatry.
[13:07] And Paul I believe is borrowing this kind of language from Jeremiah to express what he's trying to communicate to us throughout these chapters about the remnant of Israel and about the inclusion of the Gentiles into the promises given to Israel.

Now there is a similar metaphor that's used even more frequently in both the Old Testament and even a couple of times in the New Testament and that is the metaphor of the vine and its branches. Jesus uses that metaphor in John chapter 15. It's very similar. Now we sometimes run the danger of when we start running into all of these things of over interpreting sometimes.
In fact I came across one article that pointed out there are three in fact common plants that we find in the Bible used to refer to the nation of Israel. There's a vine that's usually Israel of course the

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olive tree and then occasionally the fig tree is used to represent Israel.
And I came across one article the entire article was devoted to saying that the vine represents this aspect of Israel's life the olive tree represents another aspect of Israel's life the fig tree another and I think that's just getting a little bit too complicated.
[14:17] These are all very common plants that the same process of grafting in and cultivating them would have been used throughout Israel throughout the Middle East that have been very common and so it's not a surprise that sometimes the prophets were referred to Israel as a vine sometimes as an olive tree sometimes as a fig tree but the analogy the metaphor used is almost always always the same.

Israel is the vine or Israel is the olive tree and many times the individual Israelites or a particular generation of Israelites are represented by the branches themselves.
I'll show you one place where we see the vine imagery and then we'll jump back to Romans 11 turn to Psalm Psalm 80 which is a beautiful psalm in which God expresses His care and concern over Israel but we're going to jump in sort of in the middle of this psalm if I can find it before you do and we're going to see what it says about this particular vine.
So verse 8 Psalm 80 Restore to us O God of hosts that's verse 7 verse 8 You brought a vine out of Egypt You drove out the nations and planted it so the vine is the nation of Israel God brought them out of Egypt took them into the land He planted them in the land You cleared ground for it It took deep root and filled the land The mountains were covered in its shade The mighty cedars with its branches It sent out its branches to the sea and its shoots to the river And then here comes something similar to what we read in Romans 11 Why then have you broken down its walls so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit The boar from the forest ravages it and all that move in the field feed upon it So there's this vine Israel that God has planted in the land but in light of their disobedience now judgment has come upon them Very similar to what we're seeing in Jeremiah Very similar to what we see in Romans 11 Even very similar to Jesus' own explanation of the vine He says I am the vine in John chapter 15 but He threatens to break off branches that don't bear fruit and throw them into the fire So that there is this language that occurs throughout the Bible in which the tree or the vine at times represents the nation of Israel itself I don't want to press it any further than that I don't want to try to break it down any further than that because I think it's a pretty simple on the surface metaphor We are to understand here in Romans 11 the branches as individual Jews and Gentiles either broken off and grafted in but the thing that they're being broken off of or grafted into is Israel those who are the rightful heirs of the promises made to Abraham So we identify the branches we know the tree and we have one more thing to consider and that is the root itself In fact take a look in verse 16 in the middle of verse 16 is where the root is first mentioned We are told if the root is holy then so are the branches and then you move down to verse 17
[17:22] We are told that we get to share in the nourishing root of the olive tree Later on there is a mention of it called the cultivated olive tree in verse 24 The root of the cultivated olive tree So we have this nourishing rich root That word nourishing is literally the word fatness It is a very strange odd word It is another place where language breaks down if you translate it literally We get to share in the fatness of the root of the olive tree That sounds really weird to us and given our concern with fitness and stuff we don't need anything to do with fatness but it represents the promises and the goodness of God that comes from the root itself and this has been the trickiest part of the passage Interpreters have taken the root to refer to all sorts of different things and it's the most difficult thing to identify in the passage itself but I think one of the keys to knowing what the root is is paying really close attention to verse 16 because this extended metaphor is not the only metaphor that we get in here is it verse 16 begins by mentioning something entirely different he starts with one metaphor and then he switches to another he speaks of the dough offered as first fruits and these are parallel metaphors so that whatever we identify as the root we also have to say that's what the first fruits are so the first fruits and the roots refer to the same thing the dough refers to what grows out of the root or now from the first fruits now this particular language here is also borrowed from the Old

Testament comes from the law specifically Leviticus chapter 23 where you have a list of all these offerings that can be made and one of the offerings that can be made is an offering of bread and the Israelites are instructed to bring the first portions the first fruit of the lump of dough that they have to make their bread so they bring that first portion of it and it's set aside as holy before the Lord so that when we understand the word holy here to describe the root and the first fruits of the dough we understand now that holy means what it means in Leviticus it means set apart it means different it's

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not common like everything in the world it's set apart it's special it's protected it now is devoted to God and belongs to God so that the root is something that has been set apart and devoted to God if it also is holy that's what it is now a lot of interpreters have identified the root itself as the people of Israel but that that will not work because the tree is
Israel and therefore the root can't be Israel but it also won't work because of the double metaphor here it's difficult to think of how Israel might simply be the first fruits it's difficult you can conceive that they might be the root and the blessing comes to them perhaps the tree could be the church which many people have argued but I don't think that's the case because it doesn't make sense for Israel to be the first fruits the first offerings so if the tree itself is Israel and the root in some way lies at the foundation of the tree and in fact the root is kind of like the tree the first fruits the first portion of the tree the answer becomes I think a bit more clear I think that the root is actually Abraham and the other patriarchs themselves I think the emphasis is upon Abraham throughout the book of Romans Abraham himself I believe is this root and through him all of the nourishment all of the fatness all of the richness of God's promises and blessings goes to those who are connected to them those who have some sort of connection back to
Abraham get to receive the promises of Abraham that's why in Romans chapter 4 when we were there some time ago Paul labored to show that Abraham was justified by God declared righteous by God before he was circumcised not afterwards and Paul says so that Abraham that happened so that Abraham could be the father of the uncircumcised Abraham is to be the father not merely of the circumcised of the Jewish people of his physical descendants but Abraham is to in some way become the father of all those who share in the promises made to Abraham so that the blessings the all of the goodness that comes from God is filtered through the promises that were made to Abraham in Genesis chapter 12 in the following chapters when those promises are repeated Abraham himself is the root and if we don't have a connection back to
Abraham then we don't get to share in the blessings that were given to Abraham that shouldn't be a surprise to us we looked at some of those promises made to Abraham last week and we saw over and over and over that Abraham is told that it is in you or through you or through your descendants that all the nations that is all the Gentile nations will be blessed so that our blessing even today comes as we are united to the tree and then we begin to share in the blessings that the root is drawing in and filtering and giving to the rest of us I think it's crucial that we understand this because seeing Abraham as the root connects you I think to all the other things that other people want to fit into this metaphor so some would like to argue that the root must be the covenant promises that's the root that's not the root itself
[23:28] Abraham is the root and Abraham is the one who brings in the covenant promises to us others would like to identify the root as Christ himself and yet no that's not the case Abraham is the root and it is the seed of Abraham through whom we gain a connection to Abraham himself Paul says this in the book of Galatians he says that Christ is the true offspring or seed of Abraham and by faith in Christ we therefore Paul says in Galatians we become sons of Abraham so that all of these things are being tied together if you can see clearly the identity of the various parts of this metaphor Abraham as the roots the promises come through Abraham Israel as the tree and then individual Jews and Gentiles as the branches grafted into the tree itself so that by faith just as

Abraham trusted and received the promises by faith we like Abraham trust and the promises given to Abraham become ours as we become the spiritual descendants of Abraham now you might ask yourself rightly though how exactly how exactly are we to understand Christ's role in all of these things how does this business of Christ being the seed the one in whom we trust how does he fit more precisely and more clearly into this metaphor well I don't think that we need to directly identify any of the parts of this metaphor with Jesus in order for us to see where he is involved in this particular word picture I don't think we need to sort of say well the tree is Jesus or the root is Jesus I don't think we need to do any of those things because if we rightly understand how the promises of Abraham come to fulfillment!
and how they pass on to us we can see how Christ is involved in a clear, clear fashion. One of the things that you notice as soon as you begin to read the New Testament I mean from really the first verse of the New Testament to the Gospel of Matthew is that the apostles want to make clear connections between Christ, Abraham and the people of Israel.
So in the very first verse of the New Testament we're told that we are being given a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ who is then described as not only a son of David but as a son of

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Abraham.
In fact the son of Abraham par excellence. He is the true seed and son of Abraham. And then Matthew goes on throughout his Gospel to quote passages from the Old Testament that clearly refer to Israel and yet he uses them to refer to Jesus himself.
[26:29] And the rest of the apostles follow through on that so over and over and over we find throughout the New Testament that Old Testament passages that really have a reference to the nation of Israel are quoted in reference to Jesus so that Jesus becomes in a real sense the representative of Israel itself.

Jesus stands as the spiritual Israel in the place of Israel to take the wrath of God that is directed towards Israel for their failures throughout history to take the wrath of God for all those who are grafted in to Israel.
So it is only by faith in Jesus that we are able to be grafted in to the nation that he himself stands in for. He stands. He represents the olive tree and he sheds his blood in the place of his people so that the only real true question that we have left to deal with is how do we know that we are among those people?
How do we know that we belong to this particular olive tree? How do we know that we've been grafted in? And then how are we to respond and think about that in the light of that great truth?
So take a look back at the passage with me real quickly. Paul's not going to hide anything from us. He's going to make it very, very clear to us. Verse 22. Note the kindness and the severity of God.
[27:56] Severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you provided you continue in his kindness. Otherwise you too will be cut off. And then he continues on.

And even they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in again for God has the power to graft them in again. So the grafting power of God, the way that God attaches people to the tree is what he calls God's kindness.
That is another sort of term for God's grace. And then he also refers to the necessity of faith. They were broken off because they lacked faith. In fact, he says it very clearly in verse 20.
He says, They were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So how is it, how is it that we become a part of, how is it that we can be attached to the olive tree so that we can receive the promises given to Abraham, the root of the olive tree?
How does that happen? It happens on the one hand by God's grace, by his kindness toward us. But on the other hand, from our perspective, it happens because of our faith. Faith in Christ and in Christ alone.
[29:11] A failure to have faith means that you are separated from the tree and therefore separated from the root and therefore separated from the great promises of God that come through the root.

But faith in Christ connects you to the tree and therefore to the root itself. All the blessings that we have, Paul says, all of the blessings that we have come to us because of our faith connection back to Abraham and the promises given to him.
And Paul says that because of that, because of that reality, we have no right now as new covenant believers to look upon the Jewish branches who have been broken off and to feel a sense of superiority over them.
We have no right to look at them and think that we have any reason to brag or boast that you were broken off so that I could be grafted in. Paul says that's true.
They were broken off so that you could be grafted in. That's a true statement. But he says don't become arrogant. Don't become boastful because of that. Because at the end of the day, all the blessings that you receive, all the life that you get comes because of the promises given to Abraham himself, the father of the nation of Israel.
[30:32] And you don't get access to those promises apart from faith and the one who stands in the place of Israel.

You don't get to participate in the great blessings given to the people of God unless you become one of those people by trusting in the promises given to Abraham.
Because what are the promises given to Abraham if not the promise of a coming redeemer, a coming seed offspring of Abraham who would redeem not only the people of Abraham, not only his physical descendants, but redeem all those even outside, all the families of the earth, all who trust in him.

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So Paul says in light of this truth, in light of the reality that you receive the blessings of God because you have been grafted into this tree and share in the root of Abraham, in light of that, you have no right to boast.
You have no right to be proud. You only stand fast because of faith. And faith by its very nature does not and cannot lead to boasting and bragging.
[31:45] It cannot. Because faith is wholehearted trust in another. Faith by its very nature is abandoning all that you might have trusted in yourself and reaching to another and clinging to them and all that they can do.

No child boasts in his own strength when his dad scoops him up off the ground and lifts him into his arms. No child says, I was powerful enough and strong enough to be in my father's arms.
Because faith simply clings to the one who reaches out and grabs you. Faith by its very nature leads us away from pride. It points us away from boasting.
And Paul says, since you know that you've only been grafted in to the people of Israel and share in this root because of your faith, therefore do not boast.
Faith would point you away from that. But then he gives us one more reason before we leave this passage not to boast in light of our inclusion in the promises given to Abraham.
[32:54] There's one more reason. And this I think is the part of the passage that most of us get hung up on. We get caught up on and confused by and spend most of our time pondering this.

And quite frankly, a lot of people spend a lot of time trying to explain part of this passage away. And one of the things that you always want to beware of, whether you're reading the Bible or you're listening to someone else talk about the Bible, is beware of the difference between someone who explains the Bible and someone who explains the Bible away.
I'll show you what I mean. We've already read these verses a couple times, but look down. Verse 22. Note the kindness and severity of God. Severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in His kindness.
There's a condition. The condition is you must continue in His kindness. And then there's a warning. Otherwise, you too will be cut off.
And then He says, And even if they, that is the natural branches, even if they, if they do not continue in their unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.
[34:08] So there's a warning here. That just as the natural branches were broken off because of unbelief, so too can the wild branches be cut off, be broken off because of unbelief.

That throws us for a loop many times. I think so often we stop and we say, but what about eternal security? But what about the perseverance of the saints?
But what about our assurance of salvation? How can we, and if He says this, how can we have any sense of knowing that our salvation is ours forever?
Do we have to worry that at some point we're going to be broken off? Do we have to be afraid? Do we have to be scared that at some point God's going to decide not to save us anymore or that we're going to do something that's going to cause us to lose the salvation that we once had?
We read passages like this and we want to find a way to escape. We want to find a hatched door. We want to get away from the implications of these types of verses. And there are other truths that we want to balance with this particular passage.
[35:19] There are other things that we want to say. We want to read these verses in the context of Romans 9-11 where our salvation is ultimately based upon God's sovereign choice to save some people.

And the one who sovereignly chooses to save some doesn't change his mind later on and decide not to save them. That's not how salvation works. And yet here we have this stark warning.
You too can be broken off. You too can be cut off if you don't continue in the kindness of God. If you don't continue to believe, you can be cut off.
What are we supposed to do with this? What do we make of this? We face the same problem as we read John 15, that great passage about the vine and the branches where Jesus himself is the vine, not merely representing the vine of the tree.
He is the vine there. But he warns there, every branch in me that does not bear fruit, I will break off. I will cast off into the fire, he says, and it will be consumed.
[36:22] We read passages like that and we think there's got to be some other way to explain this. There's got to be something else that we need to say because we have so many passages that say

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the opposite.

We know that God's going to continue the work that He began in us because that's what He says He's going to do in Philippians 1.6. We have these great, great promises that God will keep us and He will hold us and He will not let us go.
Even in the Gospel of John, Jesus says that those who belong to Him cannot be taken, cannot be snatched out of His hand. And so in our minds we want to take those verses and find a way to cancel out verses like we see here in this passage and in John 15 because they worry us, they make us frightened that we're going to lose any assurance that we have or that we might at some point lose our salvation if we fail to do the things that we need to do.
And so we are tempted, rather than explaining these verses, we are tempted to explain them away and push them to the side and move along as quickly as we can.
But the truth of the matter is that we need to take every passage on its face value. We need to hear what the Bible says in every place. And yes, there comes a time when we bring all that together and we synthesize it and we make sense out of passages that guarantee that we cannot lose our salvation with those that threaten or warn us.
[37:50] There's a time where we come and we bring those together and we make sense out of all of those together. But we never do that without first hearing the individual passages themselves. And what we sometimes need to hear is we need to be told if you do not bear fruit, you will be broken off and cast away.

If you stop trusting in Jesus, you will be broken off and you will not have access to the blessings and the promises anymore. We need to hear that warning because it is a real warning.
Is it true? Is it true that all those who are in Christ, who truly, really have trusted in Him, that they will bear fruit? Yes.
That is indeed true. Is it true that all those who have believed and trusted in Christ, that they will continue to believe and trust in Christ because faith in the first place was a gift from God that He gave to you.
He calls you to believe and He calls you to be born again and He will sustain you in that faith. Is that true? Yes, that is absolutely true.
[39:00] But is it also true that for anyone who does not bear fruit, for anyone who stops believing, who fails to continue to trust in Christ, that they will then be cut off?

Yes, that is true. If you want the theological synthesis, if you want it all brought together, my way of handling this is to say that the warnings that God gives are the means that He uses to cause us to bear fruit.
It's the means that He uses to cause us to continue believing. So it does synthesize, it does come together, it does fit.
But we need, before we move to that, before we try to shore up our theological positions and protect them from certain passages of Scripture, we need to stop and we need to hear what those passages say.
And when we hear them and we respond the way that He intends for us to respond, then we begin to see why it was put there in the first place. How many people do you know, how many people have you known in your life that at one point in time they claimed to walk with Christ, they did all the things and outwardly they looked no different from you or anybody else that was active in church and doing all of those things and they seemed to be a believer in Jesus and they said they were a believer in Jesus and yet now they stand having walked away from that and they're no longer following Him.
[40:28] How many people do you know that at one point in time were active in ministry and bearing fruit and the fruit of righteousness, the fruit of good works in their lives and yet now there's no fruit to be had and you would never guess that this person had ever at any time claimed to be a Christian.

How many times do we meet people like that and what do we say to them? Do we say to them, it's okay because at one time you believed and were connected to the tree and you can't be broken off, you're okay.
Do we say to them, it's okay because you cannot be separated from Christ in any way or do we look at them and do we say to them with full conviction, if you don't bear fruit, you will be cast into the fire.

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If you don't continue in faith, you will be broken off. And if their faith was ever real, if their faith was ever genuine, I believe that the Holy Spirit will come in and use that warning to call them back to himself.
I believe that he will use these words if we don't explain them away and push them to the side. He will use these words in the hearts of some of you here today who have wandered away and you need to hear the warning.
[41:39] You need to hear it clearly. If you don't continue in faith, you'll be broken off. And I believe he can use that to bring you to repentance and to turn you around. I believe he can and will do that if we will hear what the Word of God has to say.

If indeed Abraham is the nourishing root and it's only through connection to the tree of Israel that we find that we have the promises of salvation and that we're connected by faith, how can we avoid the reality that if we do not believe or we cease to outwardly believe, how can we avoid the reality that we will not have a connection to the nourishing root that we so desperately need?
And how can we fail to warn others who are potentially lost and headed to hell if we don't tell them, don't have confidence in what you did in the past, continue in his kindness now, continue believing him now.
We have to see and we have to understand that the warnings of Scripture are there for a reason. They are there to tell us that if you don't use the means that God has provided to receive salvation, faith, if you don't continue to trust and follow and therefore fruit to be produced in your life, if you don't continue in those ways, you are and will be lost.
How can we fail to say that to people who desperately need to hear it? The Apostle Paul doesn't fail to say it. He makes sure that the readers of this letter hear after all of his language about grace and justification by faith throughout this book.
[43:29] He's fine with looking the Romans in the eyes and saying, but if you don't continue his kindness, if you don't continue to believe, if the natural branches were broken off, you can be broken off just as easily, snapped off and separated from the only means of hope that you can.

There's one other thing in this passage that we need to comment on before we're done this morning and that is that Paul says that if indeed he's able to graft in these wild branches, if he can put you Gentiles and attach you to the promises of Abraham, how much more easily can he not take those broken off natural branches and graft them back in?
Because this ties us back into the whole purpose of these chapters in Romans. Romans 9-11 are all about dealing with the issue of those Jews who appear to be cut off.
They appear to be broken off. And Paul holds out hope though and says, but there's always a remnant. There are always those among the Jewish people who believe. And now he's saying one of the reasons you shouldn't be arrogant is because God has the power to take them and graft them back in and it's easier to do that than it is to graft in a wild olive branch.
Don't be arrogant. You only have your salvation because of Abraham the father of the Jewish people. Don't be arrogant because you too can be broken off. And then don't be arrogant because God just might begin to graft some more of these back in and that's easy for him to do.
[45:04] He can graft them back in. And in fact I think that our hope should be not only for the Jewish people I think that if we understand Romans 9 through 11 rightly we will be encouraged and emboldened to share the gospel with the Jewish people.

I think that that should be a natural outcome of reading and understanding these chapters. We should say God's in the business of grafting them back in. He's in the business of saving the remnant. I want to be one of those who goes and preaches the gospel to the remnant.
I think we should be passionate about sharing the gospel with the Jewish people. But I also think that we should be encouraged and we should become passionate about sharing the gospel with all those who could be described as broken off branches.
All those who at one time professed faith and now do not. All those who at one time bore fruit for Christ and yet now do not. if we read this passage rightly we should be emboldened to go to them and to give them the warning but then to also say but he can restore but he can heal but he can connect you to the nourishment that you so desperately need if you will only trust in him.
Let's pray.

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