

Romans: Faith Comes by Hearing

Romans 10:14-21

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October 7, 2001

If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 10. Last week we were in verses 1 through 13 and Paul went out of his way to stress the centrality of faith; we're not saved by our own works, we're not even saved by our own righteousness, we're saved by the righteousness of Christ. How do you get that righteousness? You call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. You trust Him, you confess with your mouth and with your heart that He is the Lord and you shall be saved. Paul goes out of his way to stress the importance of saving faith. We don't contribute to our right standing before God through our deeds. It's not our righteousness that makes us right with God. We don't have to perform great feats in order to be in saving relationship with God. No, we simply must confess Christ. We trust Him. We turn away from our righteousness, we turn away from our vain attempts at satisfying the demands of God's justice and we renounce our own attempts, instead trust in what Jesus has done in who He is and what He had done. We cry to God, we cry to God in the name of the Lord Jesus and in Him we find salvation.

Now Paul, in Romans 10 verses 1 through 13, says that that is not unique New Testament teaching. He says, that's Old Testament teaching. Even the Old Testament teaches that the way you're saved is that you call on the name of the Lord, and so Paul continues that argument this week, in Romans 10 verses 14 through 21. And you ask yourself the question, "If that is so, if that's what the Old Testament taught, how could you miss that?" More pointedly, you ask the question, "If that's what the Old Testament taught, how did Israel miss that?" That's precisely the question that Paul is asking today in Romans 10: 14 through 21. Let's hear God's inerrant word.

How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS!" However, they did not all heed the glad tidings; for Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?" So faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of

Christ. But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; "THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD." But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? At the first Moses says, "I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU." And Isaiah is very bold and says, "I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO SOUGHT ME NOT, I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME." But as for Israel He says, "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE."

Amen. Thus ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He add His blessing to it. Let's pray.

Our Lord and our God, we ask that You would give us ears to hear and hearts to respond to the truth of Your word, especially the word of Christ. In Jesus name we ask it. Amen.

How is it that a person comes to reject salvation? How is it that a person comes to bless the gospel? That is a question that we've thought about a lot in the book of Romans. Paul gave some very strong answers to that very question in Romans 9, having to do with God's sovereignty. But you know, at the end of Romans 9 he was asking the same question again, when in verses 30 through 33 he asks, how could it be that Israel would have stumbled at the stumbling block of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one who was made to be the corner stone. How could they have made a stumbling block out of Him and rejected Him and the gospel?

And Paul is asking that same question again here in Romans chapter 10. Is it because the gospel is not intellectually compelling? It doesn't measure up to the intellectual demands of men and women. Is it because there is not enough proof of the gospel, is that why some reject salvation? Is it because the church has failed to present the gospel, or because the church has failed to present it compellingly or because the church has failed to present it attractively? Is because of cultural barriers, is it because of communication problems? Well, Paul is dealing with that very question here in Romans 10 verses 14 through 21, "How is it that a person comes to reject the gospel?"

That's the question that he's asking, and I want you to see three things that he teaches us here. He begins with four questions in verses 14 and then in the very first sentence of verse 15. Then he gives you four answers in the second part of verse 15 all the way down to verse 21, skipping verse 17, and then in verse 17, he tells you two very important things about saving faith. Those are the three things I'd like to look at with you this morning, Paul's four questions, and Paul's words about saving faith.

I. Why hasn't Israel been saved?

Let's start off in verse 14 in the first phrases of verse 15 and let's see what four questions Paul has for us. The big question in this, if you are saved by calling on the Lord, then why hasn't Israel been saved? That's the big question that Paul is facing, and in order to help you get at that question, he has four questions which he states in succession in verses 14 and 15 and he doesn't give an answer to them there. He just puts the questions out and then later in this passage, the end of verse 15 all the way down to verse 21 he'll give you his answers.

Here, he's giving you questions, and the reasons that he's giving you these questions is for diagnostic purposes. He wants you to ask these questions so that you rightly locate where the problem is when people reject the gospel and that's actually the first thing we learn here in this passage. In verses 14 and 15 we learn that it is vital to our evangelism to understand the root causes of rejection of the gospel. You have to understand why people reject the gospel, and that's why Paul is asking these four questions. Go back for a second to verse 13. In verse 13, Paul says that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Now, of course by that he means, whoever calls on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved, and that immediately raises a question. He has said, that's the teaching of the Old Testament and so the question pops into your mind, "Surely if that is the Old Testament teaching, of all the people on earth, Israel would have gotten that message because that book was uniquely given to Israel. But in fact, Israel has not, in general, called on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in fact as we look around, Gentiles have. And so the question is, "Why? Why has Israel not called on the name of the Lord and in so doing found salvation?" That's the big question.

So Paul asks four questions in order to diagnose that situation. Here they are. Verse 14, "How will Israel call on Christ if they have not believed in Him." That's what Paul means when he asks, how will they call on Him whom they have not believed. That's the first question. Second question, "How will Israel believe in Christ if they have not heard the gospel of Christ" or perhaps he means, if they have not heard Christ himself personally make these claims? How will Israel believe in Christ if they have not heard the gospel of Christ. That's what he means when he says, how will they believe in whom they have not heard? Third question, "How will Israel hear the gospel of Christ without a preacher of the gospel?" That's what he means when he says, how will they hear without a preacher? And fourth and finally, "How will preachers ever herald the gospel unless they are sent by God. " That's what he means when he asks the question, how will they preach unless they are sent?

So, what's the point of these questions? Why does Paul throw out a series of questions as part of the beginning of his response? Well, it's very simple, Paul wants us to understand specifically the problem of salvation. It is vital to rightly

understand the reason why people reject the gospel, why they reject salvation, and Paul in asking these four questions, is basically saying this, "Is the problem that God didn't send messengers, is the problem that the messengers didn't proclaim the message that God sent them to proclaim, is the problem that the people didn't hear that message, or didn't understand that message, or is the problem that the people did not obey and in their disobedience they refused to believe?"

He's asking these questions as a diagnostic, and my friends, it's very timely for us to pause and ask if we have it clear in our own minds, "Why it is that people reject the gospel?" If you answer that question wrongly it could have disastrous effects on the church. Let me take you back two centuries. There was a very pious man who lived in Germany and as he looked all around him he saw the most intelligent people, the leaders of the culture, the cutting edge educated class rejecting Christianity in droves, and this concerned him. He said, "What could be the problem?" And so he wrote a series of lectures called, "Lectures on Christianity To Its Cultured Despisers." His name was Fredrick Schleiermacher and he decided that this was the problem: Christianity was not sophisticated enough in the eyes of the leaders of the culture around him, it didn't seem to be up to date, it didn't seem to be answering the questions that they were asking, it didn't seem to be such a form of belief which was sufficient for modern educated people, so he attempted to update Christianity and to make it more relevant and appealing to his peers. The problem was, that he changed the gospel in the process, because he misdiagnosed the problem. The problem wasn't with the gospel, it didn't need updating, it didn't need to be made more relevant. My friends, the gospel is painfully relevant, it speaks to sin. And what's the biggest problem in the world? And you know it in your relationships, and the gospel gives a solution to that. What could be more timely?

But the problem is this: he located the problem in the wrong place. He thought the problem was with the message or with the way the message was communicated, and he ended up changing the message in the process.

Now, you might be saying to yourself, "I've never read a book by Fredrick Schleiermacher, you've totally missed me in that particular illustration." Well, I say to you, "I'm glad you haven't read a book by Fredrick Scheiermacher, thank God, but this is still relevant to you." Because some of you have brought friends to evangelical churches to hear the gospel and they've been offended by something. They may have been offended by not being welcomed, or they may have been offended by the worship, it wasn't traditional and they wanted traditional, or it wasn't contemporary and they wanted contemporary, or some other thing and they've said to you, I'm not coming back. You've thought, well maybe we need to change the church, maybe we need to change the presentation of the gospel to make it more appealing to them. My friends, you've located the problem in the wrong place. Paul is giving you these questions so that you make sure that you understand that the problem isn't with the gospel,

and it isn't even ultimately with the church, and I know there are more problems in the church than you know about. The problem is somewhere else, and Paul in his answers is going to put his finger right on the place where the problem is, so listen closely.

II. Paul's answers.

Look at His four answers now as we get to verses 15 through 21. Now, notice he answers these questions in the reverse order. He's building up to something, he answers the fourth question first, the third question second, the second question third, and the first question fourth. He goes in reverse order working through these questions. Again, let's come back to the big question, "If you're saved by calling on the Lord, then why hasn't Israel been saved?" He answers that by his four questions in verses 14 and 15, and then he brings you back to it again.

So, why is it that Israel has not called on the Lord? Here is his grand message in verses 15 through 21. It is vital in our evangelism to understand that the problem is with the will. The problem in the people rejecting the gospel resides in the will. You know, one clever preacher put it this way, "The heart of the problem in the problem of the heart." It sounds silly, but it's true. The problem he fingers is the problem of will. Look at his answer to these questions. What are his answers, where is the real problem to be found, why hasn't Israel called on the Lord? Well, let's walk through it and see what he says.

Look at verse 15, at the second half of the verse. He says, Israel has failed to call on the Lord not because God didn't send preachers to preach the good news. He says in verse 15 they did. In fact the Old Testament proves God sent preachers to preach the good news, and he quotes from Isaiah 52:7 and he says, look, even Isaiah preached the good news to the people of God in the Old Testament, so the problem isn't that God fails to send messengers.

Secondly, look at verse 15 and 16 this time. Secondly, he says the problem is not that Israel didn't have preachers to proclaim the good news to them, or that the preachers failed to proclaim that good news. He says they did, and the Old Testament proves it, and he goes to Isaiah 53 verse 1 and he says, look Isaiah said I proclaimed it and nobody listened to me, so it wasn't that the preachers had failed. The message was delivered.

Thirdly, look at verse 18, he says, it's not because Israel didn't hear the good news. They didn't heed the good news, but they did hear it. They heard the good news, and the Old Testament proves it, and he quotes from Psalm 19 verse 4 and he says, their words have gone out in all the lands. And you immediately stop and you say, wait a minute, that's a miss-application. The first part of Psalm 19 deals with general revelation, God's revelation in nature. How can you appeal to that passage Paul and say that they've heard the gospel, when that passage is

talking about general revelation? Because Paul is saying this, just like God has given a witness to Himself and to all the world through creation, so also since the days of Jesus Christ and the apostles, He is sending His message to the ends of the earth, and the Jews have had every opportunity to hear the message and respond to it. Just as he set out witness to Himself through the creation, now He's sending out a universal witness to Himself through the gospel. The gospel is going out to all the ends of the earth, and so Israel has heard the good news.

Fourthly, in verses 19 and 20, he says the problem is not that Israel did not understand it. They did or should have. It may be that Paul is saying in response to the question, did Israel understand? Well, yes and no. Yes, there is no intellectual problem here, and the way he proves that is to quote from both the law and the prophets. Notice that the first quote in verse 19 comes from Deuteronomy 32 verse 21, then the second quote in verse 20 comes from Isaiah 65:1 as if to say, look both the law and the prophets in the Old Testament make it clear that the gospel was clearly understood by the people of Israel, and it was made so clear, even the Gentiles understood it. Here's the idea, Paul is saying, look at the Gentiles, they were never theologically very sharp, they were a bit dimwitted, they were a nation without understanding, and they understood the message of the gospel in the Old Testament. Well, if they understood the message of the gospel in the Old Testament and they were D students, how could the A students have not understood it?

The point is there is not an intellectual problem here. This isn't an intellectual problem, the problem is located somewhere else, so you say, "Where is the problem?" He tells you in verse 21 doesn't he? The problem is with the heart. The problem is with the will of Israel, the disobedience and unbelief of Israel is the problem. Look at his words, Isaiah says, "All day long I've stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." Do you notice the correlation between disobedience and unbelief? Because of their obstinence and moral depravity, they refused to believe. Their moral rebellion lead to a refusal to trust in the only way of salvation. My friends, never underestimate the impact of moral depravity. You know, it's very easy for us as believers to say, "Oh, well I'll go ahead and do that sin, I know that God will forgive me," but what the Bible teaches is that moral depravity steels our hearts to the gospel. When we follow our own way, when we are disobedient to God's word, to God's law, when we sin and transgress that law, it hardens us to the gospel. That's what happened to Israel.

Let me give you an example. Maybe you have a problem with pride, and you excuse it because you know lots of people who have problems with pride, but do you know what pride can do? Pride can be translated into a self-reliance, which in the spiritual sphere is deadly because the gospel teaches you that you can't rely on yourself, you must only rely on the Lord Jesus Christ. But if you are the captive of pride you have been steeled to the message of the gospel, which is, you can't do it, you must trust in Jesus Christ, and so your very pride has made

you impervious to the message of the gospel.

Or maybe you're captive to a sexual sin, and you're seeking fulfillment of your sexual desires outside the bounds of marriage, and you think, "Oh the Lord will forgive that, He's a gracious and forgiving God," but if you continue to pursue that way, what you'll find is your heart becomes divided because your satisfaction is being found in a temporal thing, a fleshly thing which is against the commands of the Lord. And you find it's a very powerful and gratifying thing and suddenly you find that your desires are different from the desires that a believer ought to have. The believer is satisfied in communion with God, and that's a very different kind of satisfaction than illicit sexual activity. But the greater the gratification of that activity, the less appealing the communion of God and the satisfaction that comes from it is to the person when the gospel is offered, and so the pursuit of that sin becomes a barrier to embracing the gospel.

You see, friends, we could give thousands of illustrations like that where our wills and our moral depravity make us impervious to the gospel and incapable of believing it. The apostle is saying that unbelief is disobedient. You see, the will is the battleground of faith, and the great satanic weapon against faith is moral depravity. Paul is saying, why is it that Israel didn't call on the name of the Lord? Because she was disobedient, and you could list any of the ten commandments: she went after other gods, she sought the right god in the wrong way and you could go down the list and in each of these ways you could see how the depravity of Israel kept her from embracing the Savior.

Finally, there is this, let's go back to verse 17. Paul here makes an amazing statement. It's one of those verses that you memorized a long time ago: "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." What in the world does that mean? What is saving faith? What is Paul saying here? Well, let me say this, Paul is saying that saving faith entails believing the gospel's message about Jesus and trusting in Him. Saving faith entails believing the Bible's gospel message about Jesus and trusting in Him. Faith, saving faith, presupposes and requires the word heard from Christ and about Christ. So saving faith requires that we hear the message that Christ has appointed and commissioned preachers to preach about Himself, and that we believe that message and the message is fundamentally about Christ: who He is and what He has done. In other words, Paul is saying, saving faith comes from Christ Himself appointing preachers of the word to preach a word which is about Him, and saving faith is an embrace of that word, from Christ and about Christ.

And I just want to pause and say that is why Bible preaching, expository preaching is so important my friends. I realize there are other kinds of preaching and some are easy to listen to, but I want to call you to realize how significant this is. If faith comes by hearing, and that hearing is the hearing of the word of Christ, then you need messages preached from the pulpit, which are suffused with Scripture. You need messages from the pulpit that are full of Bible and of

gospel and of Christ Jesus because that's the only thing that is productive of saving faith. I want to say that there are many churches, many fine churches, evangelical churches, that are out there preaching a lot of things, but not the Bible. You can hear about 'Seven Plans to Better Financial Planning,' you can hear 'Eight Steps to Being a Better Parent,' 'How to Improve Your Love Life,' 'How to Be a Better Husband,' 'How to Be a Better Wife,' but you hear very little gospel, you hear little Bible. The Bible is used as a launching point and the preacher talks about what he wants to preach about.

The reason we are so doggedly committed to Bible exposition is because faith comes by hearing, and that hearing is the hearing of the word of Christ, not the latest ways to have a more satisfactory life, but about God and about His mercy, and His grace, and about the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we are doggedly committed. And that means that when you pack up and move to some other place or to some other city you ought to seek out with an absolute deliberation a church that will preach the Bible. It may have all manner of other deficiencies, but if it's preaching the Bible, preaching the gospel, that's where you want to be, you want to be feeding on that because that's where saving faith comes from. The Apostle Paul is saying it is precisely because Israel, somewhere along the line, began to feed upon something else other than the word of God that she did not believe.

My friends, as best as we can, the elders and the ministers of this congregation, we're not going to be a party to that happening here, but you must look to the word of Christ yourself if you would have salvation. Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, help us to be hearers and doers of Your word. In Jesus Name, amen.

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