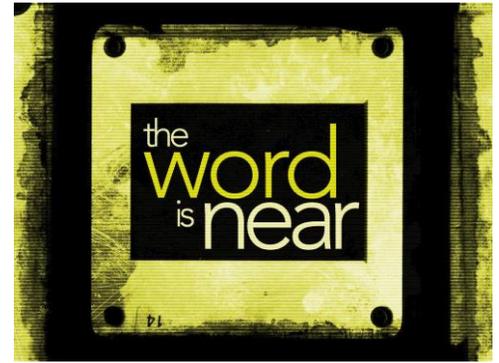


Genesis 37:1-4, 12-28
 Psalm 105:1-6, 16-22, 45
 Romans 10:5-15
 Matthew 14:22-33



THE WORD IS NEAR YOU

The lesson in Romans 10 today is in the middle of Paul's explanation in Romans 9-11 of how Jews and Gentiles are all part of God's plan of salvation. Paul, himself a Jew, yearned greatly for his own people to see the light he had seen on the road to Damascus in Acts 9. *"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race"* (Rom 9:3).¹ To Paul it was as if his own kinsmen had run their long race, only to turn aside in sight of the finish and fail to win the prize. In his writing you can sense his feeling of tragic loss, reflected from the heart of God: *"They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ"* (9:4-5). Paul had great love for his fellow Israelites.

And yet Paul knew why God had rejected many of his people, including most of their leaders and authorities. In the first place, there was prophecy. God revealed his plan for the salvation of all mankind, not just Israel: *"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth"* (Isa 49:6). And secondly, in spite of the law and their zeal to obey it, the Jews had gone wrong along with the rest of mankind. Romans 10:2-3 says, *"I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness."*

God has always known that no one can make himself righteous through obedience to the law, because for man, *knowing* what is right and *doing* what is right are two different things. No one understands fully why this is true, but it is. The "enlightened zeal for God" Paul spoke of (see Rom 10:2) must come through *faith in Christ*, rather than obedience to the law. Romans 10:4 says, *"For Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified."* And this brings us to our lesson today, beginning in Romans 10:5.

Romans 10:5-13. *Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by it. ⁶But the righteousness based on faith says, Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach); ⁹because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved. ¹¹The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. ¹³For, "every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."*

- *Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by it (v.5).* This is based on Lev 18:1-5, which concludes, *"You shall therefore keep my statutes and my ordinances, by doing which a man shall live ..."* This seems perfectly reasonable, but it has never worked.

Men find all kinds of ways to avoid practicing "righteousness based on the law." For example, (1) men do not always see the law's *intent*. The Jews had gone off the deep end in this. On the Sabbath, you could care for a sick person as long as you did nothing to heal him, etc. We also at times become "legalistic" and

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV unless otherwise noted.

forget to consider the needs of others or see things from their viewpoint. And (2) even when we do interpret the law correctly there are times when we yield to desires of the flesh and knowingly disobey it.

- *Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) ... (v.6).* There are at least two issues here. First, as soon as you begin to think you or anyone else is good enough or righteous enough to "ascend to heaven," you are beginning to deny the need of that person for Christ's suffering and death on the cross. You must never "bring Christ down" in this way. It is a fatal error.

Second, if you ask *your heart* "Who will ascend into heaven," your *heart* is not going to know the answer. But the Spirit of Christ, whose mind no man can change, will answer from the Bible. If you have worshipped Jesus and believe there is nothing more to do, he will give you verses like Matthew 7:21-23. Or on the other hand if you believe you are beyond saving, he will give you verses like John 6:37-39 etc.

- *... or "Who will descend into the abyss?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead) (v.7).* This follows from v.6 and seems to address those who deny the resurrection and say neither Christ, nor anyone else, could ever rise from the dead. But without the resurrection, Christianity never would have begun in the first place.

- *But what does it say? The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart... (v.8).* "It" refers to righteousness though faith rather than the righteousness though obedience; nevertheless, Paul's words here are reminiscent of Deut 30:11-14, which concludes, "... *the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.*" When you live by faith in Christ Jesus, *the word of faith* has power to produce in you a righteousness that the word of the law has never been able to achieve.

- *... because, if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (v.9).* If someone knows they are not saved, and knows why, and asks, "What must I do to be saved?" you can give them Romans 10:9. This is the advice Paul and Silas gave the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30-31.

If confession and belief are not genuine, v.9 will not work. Compare the answer Jesus gave the rich young ruler in Mark 10:19-22. What did the ruler not yet understand, that the Philippian jailer understood?

- *For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved (v.10).* This supports v.9. If someone believes Jesus died to pay for his sins, there will be no place for pride or a sense of self-righteousness. Jesus told the story of the Pharisee and the tax-collector and said, "*I tell you, this man (the tax-collector) went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted*" (Luke 18:14).

For the Jews, this new gospel of salvation by faith took a lot of convincing. Paul used Isa 28:16 (NIV), "*See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed*" in support of "*No one who believes in him will be put to shame.*" in v.11.

Then he used Joel 2:32, "*And it shall come to pass that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered*" in support of "*Every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.*" in v.13.

It is remarkable that Jews in that day believed so firmly in their own self-worth that they found this wonderful gospel of truth so difficult to accept. And it is sad that so many people today believe the same.

Romans 10:14-15. *But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher? ¹⁵And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!"*

- All four questions in this final passage are rhetorical. Today there are millions who do not believe in Jesus Christ. "Why would we 'call upon' someone who died long ago?" they ask.

An increasing number of Americans enter adulthood without ever hearing the gospel. How could they "believe in" someone they never heard of? No wonder Paul referred to Isa 52:7, "*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation,...*" Your feet are beautiful indeed, when you, having "*shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace*" (Eph 6:4), begin to share your faith in Jesus Christ with others!