

Romans 10 – Spreading the Message

We saw last week that God's intent is for all men to be saved. The last verse we read was "for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." The concept of God's salvation is so simple, even a child can grasp it, and yet there are multitudes who have not received His forgiveness. Why is that, and what can we do about it? This is the next focus of Paul's instruction in Romans 10, starting with v. 14.

"How then will they call on 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 someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'"

There is a clear logical progression in these questions Paul asks, and the answer is clearly understood, even without being verbalized. How can people believe in Christ unless someone tells them about Him? Who is going to tell them? The answer is: we are. All believers have been given the command to tell the whole world the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. We call it the great commission, and it is found in Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47 and Acts 1:8.

We preach the good news, so people can hear and understand it, but then v. 16 counters with, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?'" Our primary responsibility isn't to make people believe – it is to proclaim the good news, God's offer of salvation to everyone who will receive it by faith. The prophets weren't responsible for how the people reacted to their messages – they were just responsible to deliver the message God gave them. The same thing is true with us today. There will be people who scoff and reject the gospel. There will be people who are indifferent to the gospel. And there will be people who joyfully receive the gospel. Remember Jesus' parable of the sower? (Mt 13:1-9) He identified four types of hearers: those like the hard soil of the path, those like rocky ground, those among thorns, and those like good soil that produces grain. As Jesus said at the conclusion, "He who has ears, let him hear." The seed was exactly the same in each one, and the work of the sower was exactly the same. The difference was in the recipient's willingness or ability to take in the seed.

Verse 17 declares, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." There is a difference between the physical act of hearing and the spiritual act of hearing – allowing the message to penetrate the heart. In Gal 3:2 Paul asks, "Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?" Again in v. 5 he mentions hearing with faith, and then points out, "just as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." (v. 6) What did Abraham believe? What he had heard from God regarding His promises. Throughout the book of Romans, faith has been the key element, and it is our responsibility to practice it. The word of Christ is the good seed, the life-giving truth that is essential for us to receive by faith – believing what Jesus has said and done regarding our sinful condition.

Again Paul counters with a question – "But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for 'Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.' But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says, 'I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.' Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, 'I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.' But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'" These verses show the interplay of God's

sovereignty and human freedom. God, in His sovereign grace, caused the word of His salvation to go to the ends of the earth, yet the Jews, who were His chosen people, who saw the displays of His power, didn't understand that they needed to place their faith in Him. Why is that, you ask? Because they were trusting His election, that they were His chosen people. They didn't understand election was about how He would use them and bless them in His bigger plans. Then God sovereignly said He would use the Gentiles to bring Israel to jealousy, to draw them back to Him. God would provide salvation to the gentiles who weren't looking for it, while holding His hands out to His own people, who refused His salvation. Though God is certainly capable of predetermining who would be saved, that's not the way He deals with us. He provides the means of salvation, provides the messengers to tell us about His salvation, but then requires us to respond in faith to His offer of salvation. If we call on Him in faith, we are saved. If we refuse His offer, we are condemned to hell.