



Faith Comes by Hearing

Romans 10:14-21

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Last week, we looked at the first half of this tenth chapter. This week we pick up at verse 14 to look at the second portion of Romans, chapter 10. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant. Romans, chapter 10, beginning at verse 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!' But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

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.’”

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Heavenly Father, we ask that you would make your Word true and alive to us, that by the power of your Holy Spirit your Word would take deep root in our lives, that it would be used to make us more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ, that it would indeed show us who you are and what duty you require of us. Lord, bless us as we hear from you in your Word. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

We pick up here again in Romans, chapter 10. In this chapter, Paul is continuing with his evangelistic theme. In what is perhaps known as the most doctrinally full book in all of the Bible, Paul is asking two sets of very practical questions. Two sets of questions in chapters 9, 10, and 11. As we pick it up here in our text, these two sets of questions are these:

First...*Do you know the gospel?* Do you know what the gospel is? Have you believed the gospel? Have you believed on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation? A second set of questions is this...*If you have believed upon the gospel, are you telling others about the gospel?* It's not enough that you know the gospel. You must share the gospel with others.

Paul has been reminding us of this and spurring us on to this. In the beginning of chapter 10, he reminded us about the righteousness that is by faith and that that righteousness is for everyone. That's why in verse 13 Paul can

say, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Now Paul is going to tell us why some do *not* call on the name of the Lord. In that, he is going to tell us what we must do *to* call on the name of the Lord.

I'd like us in the midst of all of the questions Paul will ask to ask two of our own and answer them this morning. First...*How does the gospel come to us?* How is it that the gospel comes to us in our experience? Second...*What happens when the gospel comes?* What difference does the gospel make? How does it affect us? How does it affect others around us? What is the effect of the gospel? These two questions: How does the gospel come to us? And what happens when the gospel comes?

How Does the Gospel Come to Us?

Let's start by taking up our first question: *how the gospel comes to us*. The very first thing I want us to see is that the gospel comes to those who believe. Beginning in verse 14, Paul asks a series of questions in verses 14-15, and they form a chain of how the gospel comes to us. Paul begins with his first question at the end of the chain, at the result, at the answer, and he works his way back up to the source.

We're going to do a similar sort of analysis. We're going to start from the result of the gospel coming to us and then to move up the chain to see how it indeed comes in the path to us. Paul asks these questions. "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?" That is the chain Paul puts before us.

It is important for us to see the entirety of the chain, both for ourselves and so we know how to bring the gospel to others. This chain actually starts in verse 13. Paul says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." I want us to see two things, one that is explicitly stated and one that is implied. First, Paul says directly that everyone who calls on the Lord will be saved. This is a statement, and it is also a promise.

Notice the word that is used here: *will* be saved. Paul doesn't say *might*. He doesn't say *could*. He says *will*. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord *will*..." With a sense of certainty. "...*will* be saved." Salvation follows upon calling on the Lord. But there's something also that's implied here in Paul's statement. That is, in order to be saved, we *must* call on the Lord. There is no other way to be saved but to call on the Lord.

That's actually what Paul has been saying throughout this entire letter, as recently as earlier in this chapter. He has never implied that there is any other way of salvation apart from Jesus Christ. There is no distinction, Paul says in verse 12, between the Gentile or the Jew. There is one Lord over all, and all are saved by calling on that one Lord.

It is by confessing that Jesus is Lord and by believing that he has been raised from the dead that we are saved. Paul says this directly in verse 9. So we must understand that salvation is calling on Jesus Christ. You must confess that you are a sinner and that you cannot save yourself. You have to call on Jesus to save you. That's salvation.

Then Paul asks the first question up the chain. He says, "How will they call on him if they do not believe?" Remember, this is still in the context of answering the larger question before Paul of why Israel and others are not saved. This is a very obvious question Paul poses. How can you call on someone you don't know? How can you

ask Jesus to save you from your sins unless you know that he is the Savior? Calling on Jesus Christ comes from our will. It is something we must determine to do. We must trust that Jesus is able to save us. We have to cast ourselves on Jesus.

There is also an element of the mind that is involved here. We have to know who Jesus is and what he has done to find salvation. It is common in our day and age to speak of not divorcing the heart from salvation. You may have heard the phrase that someone has missed salvation by 18 inches, from the head to the heart. That certainly is true. We can't just have a knowledge of salvation; we must commit to Christ. We must trust him from the heart.

You also cannot divorce the mind from salvation. Vague notions do not save us. You need to know about Jesus in order to know Jesus. It is not enough just to know *about* Jesus Christ, but in order to know him personally as your Savior, you have to begin with knowing *about* him, who he is, what he has done. This is part of the chain to knowing Jesus. This is so because the gospel is fact-based. It is a historical message. Unless you understand the facts of the life and death of Jesus, what follows is not true faith in Christ. Unless we proclaim these facts about Jesus, our message is not the gospel.

This doesn't mean you have to know everything that is in the Bible. It doesn't mean you have to know all of the details about Jesus, but it *does* mean you have to know who Jesus is, that he's God come in the flesh, and you have to know what Jesus has done, that he has purchased salvation for sinners by his death, and you have to know how it applies to *you*. You have to be able to say, "I am a sinner, and I am in need of saving." The gospel comes to those who believe, who know about Jesus and know what he has done and understand *that* before they can call upon the Lord.

Paul then proceeds up the next link in the chain by asking the next question. "And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?" If you must call on Jesus to be saved and if you have to believe in Jesus to call upon him, how do you come to believe in him? In the first matter, this is just a common sense question. It is true that you don't know what you don't know. Right? We can never be sure of the things we don't know. That's the definition of not knowing something.

So in order to believe something, we need to have it presented to us so we can know it and understand it. But there is another sense in which Paul's statement is true. It follows from what Paul has been saying throughout this letter. Because we are sinners, we are ignorant of Jesus and our need for him. We are lost. We are, the Bible says, dead in our trespasses and sins. We don't seek after God. That means if we are to believe the gospel, the gospel has to come to us, and in order for it to come to us, someone needs to bring it to us.

This is what Paul is getting at in his next two questions in verse 14. "How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?" This is important in two respects. First, Paul completely rejects the modern notion that everyone is just fine and they'll go to heaven. We see this all the time. People don't think they need any kind of special message from God. They think if they just follow the basic principles of life and do what everybody knows they'll be just fine.

That's why the world rejects the exclusivity of Jesus. They think, "I don't need to know anything specific. I don't need to know Jesus. As long as I operate by the general principles of life and I'm basically more good than bad, I'll be fine. I'll go to heaven." They don't need to know Jesus. They don't need to believe in Jesus. They don't need to call on him. That is what the world thinks, but God's Word tells us this is dangerously wrong. It tells us that only those who call on the Lord will be saved. That is why we must know and believe in Jesus, and that is why we must hear about Jesus.

There is a second thing Paul is getting at here. In order for someone to hear about Christ, someone must preach Christ to them. This is where Paul is expressing the absolute necessity of preaching. In fact, he is linking preaching to hearing. That's not to say that there are no other valid forms of communicating the gospel. After all, Paul is writing a letter here for us. But the preeminent way of telling others about Jesus is preaching.

So for someone to believe the gospel, they must be told the gospel. Over and over again in the Bible, the main way of being told the gospel is through preaching. They are so linked that the word for *preach* means to announce or to herald something. Now, what do you announce or proclaim? You proclaim the news. What news here? Why, of course, the *good* news...the good news of the gospel.

That's why preaching is so important. It is bringing the gospel to those who hear so they will believe and will call upon the name of the Lord. This is why we take preaching very seriously. It's why a great deal of effort is expended in preaching, not just by the preacher but by the hearer also. That's why the Bible is what is proclaimed from this pulpit, not culture, not politics, not news. We are to preach the gospel to God's people.

This is why you should take preaching very seriously. Do you think about this as the way you hear the gospel? Do you think about preaching as the way that Jesus is brought to you? Do you think about preaching as the means you need to call upon the Lord for all of your needs? Preaching is the God-ordained means. We must be thankful for it.

So why does Paul place all this emphasis on preaching? We see that in his fourth question in verse 15. "And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" The preacher doesn't come with his own message. He's not on his own authority. In fact, Paul asks, "How can someone preach if they're not sent?" Preachers are heralds. They announce the good news. They don't get to decide what the news is. Heralds are commissioned, usually by a king, to bring his news to the people.

The same thing is true of preachers. God sends the messenger, and if he doesn't, the message itself will not be blessed. No herald ever appointed himself. In the same way, no preacher ever appointed himself and his message. The preacher is appointed and sent by God with God's message for his people. This is exactly what Jesus was getting at when he said in Matthew 9 that we are to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers.

Think about that. It is the Lord of the harvest who sends the workers out. If the harvest is to be gathered in, we must be sent by the Lord. The Lord sends his people out into the harvest. It's exactly what happened with Paul and Barnabas in Acts, chapter 13, as they were sent out amongst the Gentiles. They were sent out with a

commission to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. It's also the same reason the prophets in the Old Testament were sent to Israel: to proclaim the Lord God and his grace.

God is the initiator of his message. He sends his messengers. What that means is if people are to be saved, they must hear the gospel. We cannot do it in our own way. We must do it in God's way, and God's way is through preaching, Paul says. Interestingly, if we look at verse 14, Paul asks this question: "And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?" This is a perfectly fine translation, but there is some nuance in this verse.

Because prepositions are a tricky thing in the original Greek language, we could also translate this, "And how are they to believe him whom they have never heard?" You see, the *in* doesn't need to go with the *him* here, and the *of* does not need to be in this translation, because the word for hearing naturally takes an *of*. You hear *from* someone, in other words. So we could just as easily say, "How are they to believe Jesus if they have not heard Jesus?"

This points to Jesus being the one who is speaking through the preacher. This is God's means of reaching his people. Have you ever had the experience of saying to a pastor, "That sermon was just for me" or "This morning you were talking directly to me," or perhaps if you're amongst the more humorous amongst us, you would say something like, "Pastor, were you spying on me this week? Because it seems like everything you said applied directly to what I'm going through."

I can tell you this. It is no particular insight on the pastor's part. I am not following you with cameras. No. That is the work of the Lord through his preacher, applying the Word to you by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is Jesus speaking. You cannot say, "I've never heard Jesus." I think sometimes we might say, "I've never heard Jesus because he hasn't spoken audibly to me. I wish I could hear God. I wish I would hear an audible voice telling me what to do."

Beloved, you hear from Jesus all the time. You're hearing from him right now through me and through the apostle Paul. Through the Word of God, you are hearing not just a man speak; you are hearing God speak. That's not on my authority, it's not on my eloquence; it's because God has so determined to use preachers to bring his Word to his people. That's why preachers are such a blessing to God's people. That's why Paul can say, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news." This is how the gospel comes to us.

What Happens When the Gospel Comes?

That brings us, then, to our second question... *What happens when the gospel comes to us?* That brings us back to the initial context for this entire discussion by Paul. Why haven't the Jews believed the gospel? You may remember he asked, "Is it because the Word of God has failed?" "Certainly not!" Paul says. Do they not know about the righteousness of faith? "No," Paul says.

We can explore this question even in our own context apart from the Jews of Paul's day. We could ask ourselves, "Why doesn't everyone believe the gospel? Why would someone not want to be saved? Is it God's fault for not bringing it to them? Is it the church's fault for not being a good example for them? Is it the preacher's fault for bringing the Word badly to them?" We might think to ourselves, "Surely no one would consciously choose condemnation and death over life and forgiveness. Right?"

Paul starts out by making a very plain statement in verse 16. He says, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel." This was true in Paul's day. It's true in our day. Paul is also reminding us that it was true in Isaiah's day, and he does this by quoting Isaiah 53:1 in the form of a question. He says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" The answer is clear. Even though Isaiah was sent by God, even though Isaiah preached the message of God, and even though the people heard it, they did not believe.

It's easy to think that the gospel was a failure at this point. Why is the gospel not effective? Who is to blame here? Paul answers this through a series of questions and quotes from the Bible. First, he asks, "Is it just that people have not heard?" Look at verse 18. "But I ask, have they not heard?" This is an interesting question. It is presuming a negative answer. It's a bit confusing because of all of the negatives going on here. Something like, "Isn't it not true that they have not heard?"

The question underlying it is, "They've surely heard about this, haven't they?" And Paul says, "Yes, of course. Indeed." He has already hinted at this with his quote from Isaiah. Isaiah says, "I brought the message to them. It was delivered. They did not listen to the message, and they did not believe what they heard." Paul then quotes from Psalm 19:4 in verse 18. He says, "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."

If you are an astute Bible student, you will look at this and say, "But, Pastor, Psalm 19 is talking about creation speaking. It's talking about natural revelation, the sun and the moon. It's not talking about preachers and preaching. What is Paul doing here?" What Paul is doing here is he is using an illustration from the Scriptures of how powerfully the gospel message has gone out.

It is actually like the witness of creation. It is everywhere. You can't escape it. Just like everyone looks up in the sky and sees the sun and sees that it is the perfect distance from the earth, just like everyone looks up in the sky and sees the moon and understands the order of creation and that it speaks of a Creator, in the same way the gospel has gone out throughout all of the world.

Now think about Christian missions. Of course there is always more to be done. There are some people groups that have not yet been reached with the gospel, but in the main, when we speak of them, they're the exception to the rule. It's some small tribe in some hinterland place with a language we don't know yet, and we're actively trying to bring them the gospel.

Really, the message of the gospel has gone throughout the whole world. It has gone even to remote places, like the jungles of Africa, like the mountains of Asia. It has gone into closed countries, like Japan and China. It has gone to previously undiscovered places, like America and Australia. The excuse cannot be that the gospel is not available to be heard. The gospel has gone out throughout all the world.

So secondly, Paul asks another question in verse 19. "But I ask, did Israel not understand?" Paul says, "Maybe it's that the people just don't understand the gospel." Paul answers *this* question with two quotes, one from the Law and one from the Prophets. What you have to understand here is Paul is using the Law and the Prophets as a summary of all of the Old Testament. That's how the Old Testament is described: the Law and the Prophets.

We might think of it *this* way. When you go out for a wonderful full-course meal, you say you had everything from soup to nuts. You may not mention the salad, you may not mention the meat, you may not talk about the sides, but when you say "from soup to nuts," what's implied is everything from the beginning of the meal to the end of the meal, the whole meal. That's what Paul is doing here with the Old Testament. He's saying all of the Old Testament speaks to this.

He starts from Deuteronomy, chapter 32, quoting Moses. He says, "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry." What he does here is shows that Israel would be provoked to jealousy and anger because another nation would receive the grace and favor Israel had rejected. Israel knew the grace of God, but they rejected the grace of God. So then, when God poured out his grace on others, they were jealous and angry because they knew what they were missing.

Let me see if I could illustrate it *this* way. Have you ever had occasion to give a gift to one child in your family? Perhaps some ice cream or a piece of cake or a toy. You can do that and everything is fine. Right? Until kid number two sees what kid number one has. Kid number two realizes they want it too, and they're not getting it. Then there is anger and jealousy, is there not? If parents want to keep the peace, they find the same thing, or as exactly as can possibly be found, to give to kid number two and just hope kid number three is not around to watch it.

That's a picture of what's happening to Israel. The only way Israel could be jealous and angry is if they understood what the other nation was getting. If they didn't know about it, if they didn't care about it, they wouldn't be jealous, they wouldn't be angry. Child number two is never angry when child number one gets an extra helping of beets. They know they don't want it. They know they don't desire it. Israel wants this, but they've rejected it, so they're provoked to jealousy.

Then Paul moves on to Isaiah 65:1 to further that same point. He says, "Then Isaiah is so bold as to say..." I think this is my favorite lead-in verse in all of the Bible. What Paul is saying here is "Not only is it in the Bible, not only does Isaiah say it, but let me tell you, he is so bold. He is in your face about this. You can't miss this." "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."

Paul is saying that Isaiah was very forthright with Israel. God had directed him in this prophecy. God is speaking through him. He says God will be found even by those who do not seek him, even by those who did not ask for him. What we must understand is that God is not to blame if we do not believe the gospel, if we do not call upon the Lord, if we do not receive God's grace. God has sent the message. God has sent the messengers. He has given the call to believe. We are without excuse if we do not obey that call.

This is the second thing the gospel does when it comes to us: it separates those who are disobedient from those who are obedient. Now at first glance, this seems like a wrong way of talking. We don't think about the gospel and obedience in the same breath. The gospel is not about obedience. Right? It's about faith. That's what Paul has been saying all along. "Pastor, why are you bringing obedience into the gospel?" Well, I'm not; Paul is.

Paul could have just as easily said, "But they have not *believed* the gospel," but he doesn't say that. He says, "They have not *obeyed* the gospel." The answer here is "Yes and no." The gospel doesn't call us to be obedient in the sense

of doing works to earn our salvation, but the gospel is also not just a nice suggestion for us. The gospel is a proclamation that is to be heard, believed, and obeyed.

That is why Paul describes the rejection of the gospel as disobedience. The gospel is of no benefit to us unless we believe it and submit to it. That's actually what the word *obey* here means. It means to follow someone, to submit to someone. The people of Israel had rejected the gospel. They had been unfaithful, Paul says in Romans 3:3. That was also Isaiah's report. "They have not believed what we have spoken."

That was the report in Hebrews, chapter 4, describing the unbelief and disobedience of Israel. "Because they refused to believe the message of God by faith." It was Jesus' report in John, chapter 12, as he was coming into Jerusalem to die for sinners. He quotes this very passage from Isaiah. He says, "They are disobedient and do not obey the gospel." We see it all around us all the time, as people hear the gospel and reject it as a waste of their time. But the gospel is good news.

The third thing the gospel brings when it comes to us is it brings about faith through the Word. God is not stopped by the sin of man. God does not give up on the gospel. In fact, he knows exactly what he is doing and that all of his promises will be fulfilled. So right after quoting Isaiah to say that they have not believed the good news that was brought, Paul says this in verse 17: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

Stop and think about that for a moment. We need faith to believe. We need to believe to call on the Lord. We need to call on the Lord to be saved. How can we do that, especially when we see unbelief all around us? What it means is faith doesn't depend on us. It's the work of Christ. How do we get faith? From hearing. How do we hear? Through the Word of Christ. How does the Word of Christ come to us? By the work of God commissioning his messengers to bring the message to sinners.

Paul closes this chapter with another quotation in verse 21. "But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'" This verse is also from Isaiah 65. It's actually the verse after the verse Paul quotes in verse 20. Isaiah is telling us that some reject the gospel, but that should not leave us without any hope. Why? Because of verse 21. Even though *we* are disobedient and *we* are contrary, God still reaches out. He is reaching out to you today.

Are you sitting here this morning and you know that you do not believe all that I am talking about? Do you know that you do not believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior? Are you here this morning because your parents made you come? Or are you here because you want to make your wife or your mother happy? God is stretching out his arms to you today. You *can* be saved. In spite of all your unbelief, in spite of all your hypocrisy, in spite of all your wasted time, the Lord reaches out to you in his mercy and his grace.

Most church growth today is not by conversion. It is the result of people choosing one church over another church or of moving from one place to another place. Are you praying for church growth? Are you praying that it would come about through the spread of the gospel? Do you long to hear about sinners coming to faith in Jesus Christ? Are you working to that end?

"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?" May our feet be beautiful and bring the good news of the gospel to our families, to our neighbors, and to our community.