

REACH|11 Week 1 of 3

“How Can They Be Saved?”

Romans 10:1-17

Nate Irwin

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. [2] For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. [3] For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. [4] For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

[5] For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. [6] But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) [7] “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). [8] But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); [9] because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. [11] For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” [12] For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. [13] For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

[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? [15] 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!” [16] But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” [17] So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (ESV)

“Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved” v. 1. Paul’s heart’s desire and prayer was not that poverty might be eliminated in Rome, not that there would be social justice, not that slaves would be freed, not that the hungry would be fed or that health care would be provided to all or that abortions would be eliminated or that there would be racial reconciliation or that the lead content in the water in Rom would be reduced or that their animals would be treated properly. But his heart’s desire and prayer to God, and he said in 9:2, his great sorrow and unceasing anguish, was that they might be saved! Yes, all of those other things are good, but they are not the Gospel. Rather, they flow out of the Gospel, they are things people do when they have been saved. But what was at the hot molten core of Paul’s theology and his being and his passion was that they might be saved.

What does he mean by that? Salvation is kind of a “churchy” term; but we know exactly what it means. What did salvation mean for those on the Titanic? Deliverance from an ocean that was about to devour them. When they saw the danger, they immediately dispensed with trifles and began to focus on their own salvation. Salvation is deliverance from danger.

Paul looks at the human race in Romans and sees danger ahead - that the ship is going down. He says in 3:23 that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glorious standard. So this whole mass of humanity is about to crash against the iceberg of God's holiness and sink. God's wrath against their sin (2:8); His condemnation of sinners (5:18); His destruction of unbelievers (9:22); the death that is the wages of sin (6:23), are all various ways that he describes the danger that looms ahead.

And he says, in effect, because I love them, because I love them, because I love them, my heart's deepest desire is that they might not perish but that they might be saved, saved from the eternal punishment of the wrath of God. Mark is going to open the Scriptures for us on the topic of hell in more detail next week, but our question today is, "How can one be saved?" What is the life raft that will take you safely away from the sinking ship of sinful humanity? Could there be a more important question than that in the whole world?

There are two roads of salvation in this text. Paul refers to them as "righteousness", for without righteousness no one will see God. There is the righteousness of works and the righteousness of faith.

What is Hard is Impossible, vs. 1-5

There appears to be a way out of our predicament, the way that most naturally suggests itself to every human being. That is, to swim for it. The ship is going down, so I'm going to hit the water with my arms and legs moving and try to make it to shore. This is the righteousness that is based on the Law, v. 5.

This is the path the Jews were on. They worked hard at it, they had a zeal for God, v. 2, they tried to establish their own righteousness, v. 3. But they did not succeed, 9:31,32. Why? Because, as Paul had made clear earlier, they had all sinned, and the best of them, even if they had just broken the Law at one point, were as guilty as if they had broken the whole Law (James 2:10). 3:20, "By works of the law no human being will be justified in His sight." It's not a bad idea; in fact the Law is good and was given by God, and if you do obey it all, perfectly, you will be saved, v. 5 (from Lev. 18:5). Just like if you could have swum the 400 miles to Newfoundland in the cold Atlantic Ocean, you could have survived the sinking of the Titanic. The tiny little problem is no one can do it. Within 15 minutes, if the sharks hadn't gotten to you yet, hypothermia would set in and you'd shortly be on your way to the bottom of the sea.

This is a hard road, yet this is what all religions of the world try to do. A missionary in South America at the top of a mountain on which is a Catholic shrine finds a woman there with bleeding knees—because she has climbed every single stair up that mountain on her knees, in an effort to earn God's favor. It is a hard road. Muslims fast from sunup to sundown one month a year, because they believe that God puts their good deeds on one side of the scale and their bad on the other and in the end he will lift the scale and their eternal fate will be determined by which side weighs more. It is a hard road. Some Hindus starve their bodies in an effort to gain release from this cycle of life and death in this physical world. They are swimming in the ocean for all they're worth, but they're not going to make it. You see, what is hard is impossible.

Does this perhaps describe you this morning? You know you've messed up, you know you're going to be in trouble some day, and so you're doing all you can to hedge your bets, to cover your back. Let me just tell you, you're not doing nearly as much as the Jews did in their religious observances, and so God's Word to you today is that you will not succeed.

What is Possible Is Easy, vv. 6-13

But there is a second path of salvation, one not as obvious, counter-intuitive, really; obscured by the bushes and trees of worldly wisdom and human religions, a path over which the Jews stumbled (9:32), it is a righteousness that comes from God, v. 3. The great irony is that this path is not really all that hard at all—because someone else has already done the heavy lifting. You don't have to scale the heights to get salvation, as if it were inaccessible to all but the most determined people(v. 6) You don't have to descend the depths (v. 7), as if this treasure were hidden and buried deep in the earth—it has already come down and it is near you, as close as your heart and mouth v. 8!

How does that work? Again, Paul has already made it clear in the earlier parts of his letter. It is a righteousness through Christ, who is the end of the Law, v. 4. The Law was fulfilled, the Law was completed in Him, because the Law was designed to point us to Christ by showing us how hopeless and helpless we are and how much we need a Savior, and once we come to Him in faith the Law peels off like a banana peel because we've got the banana. Jesus perfectly met the demands of the Law and then offered up His sinless life on behalf of, in the place of, all who had broken the Law. The Lamb of God "was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed." (Isa. 53:5)

But it is not a blanket pardon for all of humanity; there is a condition. Everyone on the Titanic was not automatically saved because there were lifeboats on board. What did they have to do? They had to get into the lifeboats! And that took an act of faith. Would those who survived say that they saved themselves? No, they would insist it was the lifeboats that saved them. But only those who got in were saved.

The righteousness that comes from God comes fully paid for—by Christ—but it must be received by faith. That is why this second way of salvation is called the righteousness of faith, v. 6. This righteousness says because I can't, I need a Savior! Then, looking to Jesus, it simply confesses that Jesus is Lord, v. 9a, He will be my Master, and then it believes in its heart that He died for me and that God raised Him from the dead, v. 9b. And the promise is that this person will be saved! It's that simple. What is possible—what Christ made possible—is easy.

The really beautiful thing about the righteousness of faith is that it shows no favoritism, no distinctions. Rather, v. 11, everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame, at the judgment. It is for everyone, Jew and Greek, black and white, man and woman, American and Mongolian. The Lord bestows the riches of this free salvation on all who call on Him, for, v. 13, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved! The reason so many perished on the Titanic is there was not enough room in the lifeboats! The high casualty rate resulting from the sinking was due in part to the fact that, although complying with the regulations of the time, the ship carried lifeboats for only 1,178 people. There were 2,223 on board. Not so with Christ!!

But here's what faith involves. Even though there was room in the lifeboats for 1178 people, only 706 people survived! Why? The *Titanic* had ample stability and sank with only a few degrees list, the design being such that there was very little risk of unequal flooding and possible capsizing. Furthermore the electric power plant was operated by the ship's engineers until the end. Hence *Titanic* showed no outward signs of being in imminent danger, and passengers were reluctant to leave the apparent safety of the ship to board small lifeboats. The initial reluctance of the passengers to board the lifeboats contributed to the death toll. For example, Lifeboat No. 7 launched first, at 12:45 am and with only 28 people aboard, despite its capacity of 65. *Titanic* did

not initially appear to passengers to be in imminent danger, so they were reluctant to leave the apparent safety of the ship. [Wikipedia]

You see, it does take a leap of faith. You think you're on your big passenger ship that appears unsinkable. You hear rumors that it's going down. You look at what you know of Christ and He looks like a tiny little lifeboat. And you wonder, am I really going down and should I get in that thing?! Let me assure you, first, you're actually just in a little dinghy and it's about to be smashed to smithereens. And Christ, Christ is no lifeboat, He's a battleship, He's a battleship so big that He stretches from shore to shore, and you can fly into His arms and be safe!

This is the glory of the Gospel, the glory of Christ, that He is a more-than-sufficient Savior for whatever you have done. Call on the name of the Lord, and you will be saved! How will you escape if you neglect such a great salvation?

What a beautiful place for the book of Romans to end, v. 13. Isn't it enough for us to be all cozy in our Lifeboat, good to go into eternity? Well, our text does not stop here, for there is one small point left, and it is this: there are others on the ship, and for them also to be saved, they have to get into the Lifeboat. And to do that they have to know about Him. For you see

What is Easy is Impossible... Unless You Hear, vv. 14-17

Let me ask you a question. What would have happened to someone who didn't know about the lifeboat on the Titanic? He had never heard about them, never seen them, didn't even know what one was. What would be going through his mind as the ship started to sink? Only one thing: I'm going to have to swim for it. Because he didn't know there was a way out!

The logic is inescapable. You have to believe in something to call on it to save you; and to believe in it you have to know about it; and for you to know about it someone has to tell you, v. 14. For you to get in a lifeboat, you would have to know about them and for you to know about them someone would have to have told you. People are not just saved because Jesus died for the sins of the world—they have to know about Him so they can put their faith in Him and be saved. The Gospel is only Good News if it gets there in time (Carl F. H. Henry).

We understand this in the physical world. For example, have you had your children vaccinated for polio? Why? Did you wake up one day and think to yourself out of the blue, "There is this awful disease out there that is going to destroy my children and so I need to get them vaccinated?" No, you heard about the disease and someone told you about the prevention, and based on that knowledge you "saved" your children from polio.

For thousands of years, children suffered from polio. Then in 1955, Jonas Salk developed a vaccine that prevented polio. But think about this: Why did the incidence of polio not significantly decrease in the world for 30 years? Most of the world HADN'T HEARD ABOUT IT! In 1988 the World Health Organization began an initiative to eradicate the virus by 2000. Since the initiative was launched, the number of cases fell by 99.9%, from 350,000 new cases in 1988 to 483 in 2001. If determined people can spread the news of salvation from polio around the whole world in 13 years, my question is why does 1/3 of the world today still have no knowledge of eternal salvation in Jesus Christ?! 2.7 billion people who can't call on Jesus to save them because they don't know about Him? We've done a much better job wiping out polio than ignorance of the Gospel. The WHO has put the church to shame.

Maybe here's your question, "What about the innocent man in the middle of the jungle of Africa who has tried his best but just has never heard about Jesus? God surely wouldn't send him to hell, would He?" Will he be saved? And the answer is, yes, he will. He will go to heaven. The problem, as David Platt said in a sermon I heard last week, is that that man doesn't exist. You see, there is no innocent man in all of Africa. All have sinned. . .and all face the terrifying wrath of God because of their sin, not because of whether they've heard about Jesus or not. Would the guy who didn't know about the lifeboats still have drowned?

Sure he would have, but you say, hey that's not fair. Paul has already dealt with this. He says in ch. 1 that all men are without excuse because they know from nature His existence and His power. He says in ch. 2 that even those without a religious context are guilty because they have sinned against the law that is written on their hearts. All have sinned. . .and the wages of sin is death. The only way of salvation that Scripture assures us of is that people hear of Jesus, and put their faith in Him. You must have faith, in Christ, to be saved and faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ, v. 17 This is the righteousness that is by faith. It is easy, but it is impossible . . .unless you have heard.

This is why the text says in v. 15, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" The one who announced to the Jews in captivity that they were now free from their bondage, released to return home again to Israel, brought beautiful news. And the one who announces to those captive to sin that there is freedom in Jesus Christ is doing a beautiful thing. I'd like you to meet a couple of these beautiful people, Derek Joseph, who along with his wife Lacey, are going to East Asia next year to give themselves to the task of bringing beautiful news to a Muslim people group in that country who has never heard about the righteousness that is by faith. . .

So, what about you?! Or is this the part in class where you kind of slink down in your chair and try to hide behind the person in front of you so the teacher doesn't call on you?! And then when a guy like Derek actually raises his hand to answer the question, you go, "Sweet, I'm off the hook!" and then you can go back to your daydreaming.

If that's what you're thinking, you haven't got it yet. You see, you are part of a team whose job as assigned by the Coach is to deliver this Gospel to every corner of the earth. Our roles will be different; but we must view ourselves as pulling together towards the same goal; and we need to ask, "Am I pulling my weight?"

There are two issues here. The first one is, "Do you care?" Or are there other things in your life that even though they might not be wrong in and of themselves, push out from your heart any ability or time to care for those who have never heard? What would an audit of your time and your checkbook and your dreaming prove? That you are, in reality, more interested in things like fantasy football, Nordstrom Rack, eating at the latest restaurant, more horsepower in your car, your daily caramel mocha latte than you are about those who have never heard the Gospel?

"...the person who doesn't believe in taking the message of Jesus Christ to the nations, in the end, does not believe in Jesus Christ. 'No interest in missions means no interest for that particular thing for which Jesus was content to be born and to live and to die.'" (an address from the Student Volunteer Movement Convention, 1898). David Platt talks about churches who have all the trappings of church; the only thing they are missing is the heart of Christ. The heart of Christ is to seek and to save that which is lost (Lk. 19:10). So if we don't care, we really don't know Christ.

It was not that Paul had drawn the short straw; it was his grasp of theology. The only enduring motivation for missions is a deep theology; and any deep theology, ignited by the Holy Spirit of

love, will result in a burning passion for those who have never heard. When we understand that what is hard is impossible, that the righteousness of works is never going to get anyone into heaven; when we understand that what is possible is easy, that what Christ suffered for simply takes receiving and believing to appropriate it for oneself; and when we understand that what is easy is impossible unless they hear, we will be moved to join the mission. I would suggest that if you find yourself unmoved by the plight of those who have never heard, you need either a deeper theology or a greater love.

The second issue is what you actually do for the lost. Concern alone is not enough. If you know Christ, you are going to **do** something for the lost. You might be saying this morning, I'm feeling bad—and that should be enough, that's my contribution. And you know in your heart after a good lunch and with the remote in your hand, by the end of the first quarter the feeling will start to go away. Is feeling bad going to help them hear? The measure of our belief in something is what we actually do about it. So what are you doing for those who have never heard?

Let me start by sharing what we as a church do in missions, things that you are already involved with as a part of this church. 9% of general fund monies → global outreach. We have two main wheels of activity: **Strategic partnerships** (8) and **missionaries** (26).

- We support home grown laborers at about 20%; the rest comes from you senders. Thank you.
- Journey In Missions (J.I.M.) Night)
- Corporate call, strength in doing missions together as a church

Some of us God will send as go-ers. God may take the truth of His Word today and burn it into your heart such that you respond like Hudson Taylor said, "I would never have thought of going out to China had I not believed the Chinese were lost and needed Christ." Amy Carmichael had a nightmare of great masses of humanity walking to a cliff's edge and one by one dropping over to a terrible death. It was that vision that prompted her to give her life so that the people of India might be saved. Some of you need to respond in obedience to the Spirit as He moves in you to push you out from this congregation into the dark 1/3 of the world. If that's you, your next step is to talk to me and get plugged in.

But there's another role as well. We're not quite done with the passage yet. V.15 says, "How are they to preach unless they are sent?" Sent by God, for sure, as He leads and equips. But preachers need human senders as well. Paul needed senders. In fact, that is why he wrote this whole book! He was on his way to what he thought was the ends of the earth, Spain, and his plan was to visit Rome on the way, 15:24, so that the church in Rome could help him on his journey. He used a Greek word *propempo*, which means to assist a traveler in any way required, with food, money, encouragement, housing, etc. He needed them to send him so he could go and preach and those in Spain could hear and believe and be saved, so he wrote Romans as the mother of all missionary support letters, to prepare them to be ready, both theologically and with the passion of the Spirit of love.

Here's what sending might look like for you, who might never leave the cozy confines of Carmel:

1. Releasing

- From things, from dreams, from people, from kids

2. Connecting

- Get to know, write, packages, even visit. Have a Meal with our Missionaries!

3. Praying

- As you get to know, commit to pray for the specifics. Come to First Friday prayer. Join a Barnabas support team.

4. Supporting

- David Platt in *Radical Together* says “how prone we are to give our resources to good things while ignoring great need.” Christians in North America give, on average, 2.5% of their income to the church. Out of that 2.5%, 2 % of their budgeted monies to needs overseas. So, for every \$100 a North American Christian earns, he will give 5 cents through the church to a world with urgent spiritual and physical needs. This does not make sense.”

If you are a follower of Jesus, and if you have grasped Rom. 10 in your mind and allowed the love of God to enter your heart, you can be one of 3 things, as John Piper says: a zealous go-er, a zealous sender—or just plain disobedient. How can they be saved? By hearing, through a preacher, sent by a church, the Word of Christ, which can produce faith which leads to the righteousness that brings salvation.

Conclusion

From the bridge, the lights of a nearby ship could be seen off the port side. *SS Californian*, which was nearby and stopped for the night because of ice, also saw lights in the distance. Just before the *Californian's* wireless operator had gone off-duty at around 23:00, he attempted to warn *Titanic* that there was ice ahead, but he was cut off by an annoyed Jack Phillips, the radio operator on the *Titanic*. Occupied with sending backlogged passenger messages, Phillips fired back an angry response, "Shut up, shut up, I am busy" talking to Newfoundland. [I am working (the Newfoundland wireless station) Cape Race"] That was 99 years ago—one man was too busy and 1500 people perished in one night. Are we too busy today?

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