

Romans: The Mystery of Righteousness (part 5 of 8)

Let Us Preach the Good News

Romans 10:14-21

Mark Vroegop

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. ¹⁸ 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." ¹⁹ 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." ²⁰ 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." ²¹ But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people." Romans 10:14–21 (ESV)

One of my favorite Sundays around College Park is when we have the opportunity to baptize people. Beyond the fact that we are celebrating an ordinance of the church, there is something uniquely powerful about hearing the stories of conversion and transformation in people's lives. To see a person stand before a congregation of people, tell their story, and to hear the way that Jesus saved them, is compelling and motivating.

Then to see the person immersed in the water and raised up in celebration of their union with Christ, is one of the most powerful visual images of what the gospel is all about. A baptismal service is beautiful because it shines a bright light on the beauty of conversion.

I often find myself wiping away tears and thinking, "Now that's why I got into the ministry! That's why I'm a pastor."

One of the reasons that I have given my life to pastoral ministry is because I love seeing people changed through a relationship with Jesus Christ. While pastoral ministry can be very challenging and emotionally painful, there is nothing better than being only three feet away from a person who professes Christ for the first time. It is a great joy to see the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit with your own eyes and to know that you have just witnessed something supernatural and eternal.

What's more, my joy is magnified not only when I get to see what is happening, but also to know that somehow I have played a role. To think that biblical words flowing from a human mouth land upon another human being's heart and result in someone being forever changed is just unbelievable. In other words, there is nothing more incredible than being a part of God's supernatural work in the saving of people's souls.

Delivering the Good News

Our text today highlights the beauty of evangelism. It serves to extend the compelling call that we heard last week: That the word is near you...that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. I hope that there were many of you who thought carefully about what it means to be converted, and my prayer is that you will place your faith in Jesus today.

Last week was about the invitation to be saved. This week is about how that message is delivered. If the gospel is glorious and if its message is wide open to anyone who would come, then how does that message go forth? Or let me put it this way: What would it take for us to have to adjust all of our services in order to accommodate hundreds of people who were being baptized because they had been recently converted?

Romans 10:14-21 helps us understand the challenges, the method, and the beauty of how the gospel is communicated.

And I think that this message comes at a providential time during the calendar year because people are emerging from their homes, there are more opportunities to engage with our neighbors, and we could proactively use the summer for more than just rest, relaxation and recreation. We could use it for the sake of the gospel.

In order to see Paul's message here, I want to examine the text a bit differently. I'd like to start with verses 16-21 and then cover verses 14-15.

The Sad Reality Regarding Israel (vv. 16-21)

The failure of Israel to believe in the Messiah and to pursue a righteousness based upon the Law is a central theme in Romans 9-11. It is part of the shocking story of God's judgment upon His own people, and is part of the stunning display of mercy to the Gentiles. Next week we'll see how the Gentiles are grafted into God's people and the implicit warning that everyone should heed.

Keep in mind as we look at yet another angle of Israel's failure, that this material is in the Bible as a cautionary tale and as context for the gospel. It is cautionary in that God's dealing with Israel warns us about the dangers of self-righteousness. It is context in that it shows us how Paul thinks about his own people even as he attempts to share the gospel with them while, at times, being persecuted by them.

Verses 16-21 show us that effective preaching of the gospel is often resisted. And yet there is no other way for people to be saved except through its proclamation. The resisted gospel is still a gospel worth sharing. What happened to Israel says something negative about them but not something negative about the gospel.

Verse 16 interrupts the flow of thought from verses 14-15 with the following statement: "But they have not all obeyed the gospel" (Rom. 10:16). Paul uses this phrase to emphasize that merely hearing the gospel is not enough. The gospel is something that requires a response. Last week we heard Paul say that the Jews did not "submit to God's righteousness" (10:3). So failing to believe in Christ is more

than not believing; it is actually rebelling. Not believing in what I tell you is one thing, but not believing in what God tells you about you, your sin and Jesus is another thing entirely. And it is dangerous, eternally so. Such was the problem with Israel. They refused to respond to what they heard. They were disobedient.

Next, Paul quotes Isaiah 53:1 to reinforce what he is saying: "Lord who has believed what he has heard from us?" But it is the context of Isaiah 53 that makes this reference so powerful. Isaiah 53 is one of the classic Old Testament passages regarding the suffering Messiah:

³ He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. Isaiah 53:3–5 (ESV)

The Jews failed to believe the gospel. They rejected the Messiah and stumbled over Jesus Christ. It is this stumbling and this disobedience to the Lordship of Christ that makes the history of Israel so sad.

Verse 17 then enters the picture here as a summary of what is said in verses 14-15 with a particular emphasis on Christ. "*Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the **word of Christ***" (Rom. 10:17). We will look more at the process in moment, but the emphasis here is the fact that the Jews rejected the gospel of Jesus. They refused to believe the good news about Jesus Christ. The word for "word" here is the same word used in 10:8 when Paul quoted Deuteronomy 30 in reference to the gospel message: "...and the word is near you..." The Jews were religious, had a lot of faith, and heard many spiritual truths. But without Christ, it wasn't the gospel, and there was no salvation.

There are some in our culture who would like to suggest that all faith roads lead to God and to salvation. Those who espouse this worldview say that all that really matters is faith and religion in general. Others will say that it is spirituality not religion that counts with God. Yet the Bible is very clear that without believing in Christ (the word of Christ) there is no salvation.

When Peter and John were brought before the council, here is what they said:

¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.

¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:11–12 (ESV)

You see part of the motivation for the declaration of the gospel is the simple and clear teaching of the Bible that there is no other way of salvation apart from believing in Jesus. There is no other means of atonement apart from him. So your "spiritual," or "religious" family member, neighbor, or co-worker is lost apart from a relationship with Jesus.

Church, we need to feel the weight of this. There is no other way for people to be saved from their sins. And we need to know that firmly in our minds and feel that deeply in our hearts. If people die

in their sins without turning to Jesus, according to the Bible, there is no covering for their sin. Israel rejected their only hope of redemption.

Paul then turns to two questions as it relates Israel's culpability as it relates to her general unbelief: 1) Did Israel hear? and 2) Did Israel understand?

Verse 18 answers the question regarding hearing with a simple answer and an Old Testament quotation. Paul posits that they have indeed heard the message, and he quotes Psalm 19:4 a text in the context of Psalm 19 that refers to the global display of God's glory through creation. Here, however, Paul uses it as statement that the gospel has been extended to the entire world. Paul is not saying that there is no need for global missions, as if that work has been accomplished. Rather, he is reinforcing that Israel heard the gospel and the proof is that the gospel has even been proclaimed among the Gentiles.¹

Verse 19 next addresses the question regarding whether or not Israel understood. The issue is whether they should have expected a Gentile mission, and Paul cites Deuteronomy 32:21 as proof that the Old Testament foretold of this moment in her history when non-Jewish people would be welcomed into God's people. Moses himself predicted that God would use mercy to other nations as a means of rebuke and repentance for Israel.

The section concludes in verses 20-21 with a summary of the sad reality as it relates to Israel: God has graciously extended grace to people who were not seeking him while Israel consistently rebels and resists God's appeals. Isaiah 65:1-2 is quote here to emphasize God's graciousness and Israel's stubbornness. Verse 21 is especially poignant: *"All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient people and contrary people."* The sad reality with Israel is that despite the prophecies, the blessings, and the pleadings, there was very little receptivity to the gospel.

With all of these references to the prophet Isaiah, I was reminded about his calling. After seeing the beauty of God (Is. 6:1-3), being overwhelmed with God's holiness (6:4-5), and responding to the calling for service (6:8), Isaiah receives a very hard ministry. His entire ministry is preaching to people who will never corporately respond to the gospel. "Keep on hearing, but do not understand. Keep on seeing, but do not perceive" (Is. 6:9). And he was to continue that ministry until the judgment of God came: "How long, O Lord? Until the cities lie waste without inhabitant..." (Is. 6:11). Isaiah's ministry from God was one of faithful preaching and fruitless results.

So what do we make of this sad reality? A few thoughts:

1. The gospel, as we'll see in moment, is worth proclaiming regardless of the response. While the response is glorious and motivating, the possibility or the improbability of a response should not be our primary motivation in sharing the gospel or we will become easily discouraged or overly pragmatic.

¹ Schreiner, Thomas R. *Romans*. Vol. 6. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998. Print. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament.

2. God is working out his sovereign plan, and we have no idea which season of life God has chosen for us. We must declare the gospel regardless while trusting in God's plan. Adonirum Judson (1788—1850), a Congregationalist and Baptist missionary to Burma for forty years, only saw 18 converts in his first 12 years of ministry. But at his death there were 100 churches and 8,000 converts in an area that had never heard the gospel before.

So, do you have anyone in your world who is resistant, stubborn, and hard-hearted? Do you have someone who "feels" beyond the reach of the gospel? Let me encourage you to rest in the sovereign purpose of God putting you in their life. Let me encourage you that the gospel is worth sharing because it is the gospel, not just because it might be received. And let me remind you that history is filled with people who had no idea what the fruit of their life and witness would be.

The Divine Process of Conversion (vv. 14-15a)

Now that we have looked at the sad reality with Israel, let's go back to the verses that we skipped over and see what Paul says here about process of conversion. These two verses are very unusual. There is no other place in the Bible where Paul identifies the steps in receiving Christ so clearly.

Verses 14-15 features four questions and five steps (six if you include verse 13 from last week):

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?" Romans 10:14–15a (ESV)

These verses are an extension of where we left Romans 10 last week. Hopefully you will remember the sweeping appeal for salvation that we heard in verse 13: "...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." We saw that wide open door for evangelism for anyone.

But here's the thing: People are saved through a divinely ordained process. So while it is true that there is a sovereign plan that is behind everything that happens. And while it is also true that the invitation is wide open, the means by which conversion happens involves 1) sending, 2) preaching, 3) hearing, 4) believing, and 5) calling. Take note here that divine election, as true as it is, never saved anyone. And the wide open door doesn't save anyone either. To be saved a person must call because they've believed because they've heard because someone preached because they were sent.

The mission of God to save people from their sins is only accomplished through this beautiful gospel chain. Let's look at each of these:

Calling – Working through the text and backwards from the conversion process, we find that verse 14 tells us that those who are saved are those who "call on him." Last week we heard that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13). What does it mean to call?

Calling upon the Lord means to express one's confidence in and to rely upon God for deliverance and help. Psalm 18:3 says, "I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies." Psalm 145:18 says, "The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call on him

in truth.” To be a Christian means that a person calls upon the name of the Lord. To be a Christian means that a person stops looking to him or herself but calls upon the Lord for help and deliverance.

Believing – The calling is based upon more than the need for help. This calling is rooted and grounded in saving belief. Last week we read “if you...believe in your heart that God raised him {Jesus} from the dead, you will be saved” (10:9). To believe means to place one’s trust in and to count as true what the Bible says about yourself and Christ. Saving faith and belief is placing one’s hope in the promises of God’s Word. It is resting your life and eternity in all that the Bible says about you, your sin, the cross and forgiveness.

Hearing – The next step in the chain is hearing, and Paul mentions this in order to emphasize the practical reality of the witness of the gospel. People cannot believe if they have never heard the message about the gospel. Spirituality, being religious or belief alone never saves anyone. Unless a person believes in Jesus, there is no hope for eternal life. And the means by which God has appointed for the heart to be engaged is through hearing.

The world still has 6,600 unreached people groups who are not only unevangelized; they will never hear the name of Jesus unless something dramatic is done. There are over 3 billion people who will never hear the name of Jesus. It is not just that they don’t believe. The problem is that they will never hear. And if they don’t hear, they cannot believe.

Preaching – this next word in the chain relates to the actual proclamation of the gospel message. It is not enough that good and willing people are sent; those who are sent must say something. You may have heard a particular quotation that says, “Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words.” That is a very popular statement with those who emphasize the value of doing good works for gospel witness as opposed to declaring the gospel message. Now some may be reacting to people who “yelled” the gospel at people without any context of relationship and love – much like the street preacher that I heard in Chicago a few months ago. That kind of gospel proclamation is not helpful. But neither is simply doing good works.

In order for the gospel to be received and believed it must be declared and believed. The word for “preach” means to announce, to herald or declare. The reason that this news is treated this way is because of its importance and urgency. The gospel must be declared in order for it to be heard and believed.

Sending – The Greek word here is *apostello* from which we get the word *apostle*, and it means to be dispatched, especially as it relates to a message. We see this word used in a very interesting way in Luke 10:1-3.

*¹ After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and **sent** them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. ² And he said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go your way; behold, I am **sending** you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Luke 10:1–3 (ESV)*

Notice that they are sent into the harvest and sent out as lambs in the midst of wolves. This mission will not necessarily be easy. What's more I do not think that this is limited to the first-century disciples or people in full-time ministry. We are all sent. Our mission in life is to be ambassadors for Christ carrying the message of reconciliation to a world that desperately needs it (2 Cor. 5:20). The gospel is delivered through people who are sent.

Is that how you view your life as a disciple of Jesus? Do you see yourself as a person who is on a mission from God? It is very easy to allow the good things of life (i.e., your career, raising kids, developing friendships, finding a spouse, finishing your education, etc.) to diminish the calling that is on each of our lives.

I think that this text is an important reminder and a caution as the importance of understanding our mission in life. The means by which people are saved involves a process, one that specifically involves us. And we need to be careful that we don't forget why God has placed us on the earth and what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

The divinely-designed process for the conversion of people involves you and me. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ.

The Beautiful Calling of Evangelism (vv. 15b)

I've chosen to end my sermon with the second half of verse 15 because I think it is the climax of the text. Verses 14-15a lead up to this point, and verses 16-21 explain the down-side of this reality when it comes to Israel's hard-heartedness.

Paul uses another Old Testament quotation from Isaiah 52, which is contextually referring to news about the end of captivity. Verse 15b says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news." What does this mean? Paul is rejoicing in vehicle or the means by which the gospel is carried. He celebrates feet because of what they bring.

Now Paul could have chosen other body parts that are more noticeable and attractive. He could have said, "How beautiful are the lips of the person who preaches" or "How beautiful are the legs that carry the message of the gospel." But he chooses feet. Why?

I think it is because feet are so important and yet relatively unattractive and unnoticed. We have to work hard to make feet attractive. Just think how you'd feel if I told you that the application of the sermon today was that everyone was going to walk around barefooted this morning. The reason that we spend so much money on shoes and fixing up our feet is because they are not naturally attractive. Feet are a smelly, dirty, and functional part of the body.

And that's the power of what Paul says here. Functional, smelly, dirty, normal, and unattractive feet are beautiful when they are carrying the gospel. The gospel makes feet beautiful because they are carrying the gospel. The gospel takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary.

How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news. How true. But can I adjust this by way of application?

- How beautiful is the backyard grill that is used to preach the good news
- How beautiful is Vacation Bible School that is used to invite your neighbors
- How beautiful is a group of 300 people starting a new campus NE Indy
- How beautiful is a summer job that opens the door for gospel conversations
- How beautiful is a Fine Arts Camp performance used to reach out to unsaved family
- How beautiful is an invitation to neighbor to come with you to church
- How beautiful is a lawn mower used to extend grace to unsaved neighbor
- How beautiful is the soccer game or baseball game that opens the door for gospel conversations

Do you get the point? College Park this is something that we need to think about and grow in together. For all the strengths of our ministry, for all the great things that God is doing, and for all the amazing opportunities in the Indianapolis area, let's not forget why we are here and what God has called us to.

Let me exhort you to not waste your summer. With the winding down of school and people streaming out of their homes, let's be the kind of people who use normal, every-day life to make much of the gospel.

Let's think about the calling that God has on each of our lives. Let's consider why God has opened a door for you at your school, in your career, or in your neighborhood. Let's be the kind of people who understand our mission and purpose in life.

There is nothing greater than seeing God at work. But in order for people to be call on the Lord, they have to believe and to hear. And they'll never hear unless we open our mouths as people who are sent by God.

How beautiful is the church that is filled with those who preach the good news!

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