



Last Sunday morning a pastor-friend of mine tweeted, “Ever go into the pulpit thrilled with the passage, but not your sermon notes?” I feel that way every week, and my wife will vouch for that! That’s why we pray, “Speak, O Lord.” Ultimately it is God himself who *takes his truth and plants it deep in us – words of power that can never fail.*

That is the thesis of Romans 9-11: *God’s word has not failed.* Paul spends three chapters proving this assertion. What did Paul broach this subject, and why is it so important for us sitting here today?

Well, in Romans 8, Paul celebrates the blessings of salvation. But at the start of chapter 9, his celebration turns to sorrow as he contemplates the spiritual plight of his fellow Jews. Most of them are not saved but still stand condemned before God. Why? Because they have not believed in Jesus as their Messiah.

But this also raises a vital question: *Since God had promised salvation to Israel, but it’s mostly Gentiles who have believed in Christ and are enjoying the blessings of salvation, does this mean that God’s promises to Israel have failed?*

This is a critical issue, because *if God cannot or will not keep his promises to Israel, then how can we be sure that God will keep his promises to us?* Paul anticipates this extremely important question and answers it emphatically, saying,

“But it is not as though the word of God has failed....”

- Romans 9:6

Paul proves this assertion with four main arguments. Paul’s first argument is that *God never promised to save every single Jew.* Paul uses God’s own statements from the Old Testament coupled with illustrations from Israel’s history to prove his point. In doing so, Paul draws a distinction between *physical* Israel, which is based on biological descent, and *spiritual* Israel, which is based on God’s sovereign choice.

That’s Paul’s first argument, which makes up most of chapter 9. Then near the end of chapter 9 and all the way through chapter 10, Paul presents his second argument, which is that *the Jews are responsible for their refusal to believe the gospel.*

Instead of receiving God’s righteousness as a gift through faith in Christ, the Jews were determined to establish their own righteousness by keeping the law of Moses. They were so focused on pursuing “law righteousness,” that they stumbled over the Lord himself, Jesus the Messiah, the very one to whom the law pointed.

But even this was part of God's plan. Paul proves this by quoting the prophet Isaiah, who centuries earlier had predicted that the Lord would become to Israel "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense" (Rom. 9:33; cf. Isa. 8:14). The apostle Peter quotes this same prophecy from Isaiah and then says,

... They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

- 1 Peter 2:8

Scripture teaches that *God is sovereign*, and *people are responsible*. Both statements are true, even though we cannot fully reconcile them in our minds.

For the last month I've been reading Iain Murray's book, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1858*. In one of the chapters, he talks about the evangelist John Leland, who was "possessed with a burning zeal for the salvation of [his] fellow-men." G. N. Briggs, the 19th Governor of Massachusetts, recounted a conversation that Leland had with a physician who had recently become a Christian and was eager for more teaching:

... After some conversation, the Doctor told him that he should be glad to have his views upon two or three points of religious doctrine. First, as to the Sovereignty of God. This was with Elder Leland a favourite theme, and one in which his head and his heart had been engaged for sixty years. He proceeded, and occupied several minutes in repeating appropriate passages of Scripture, and commenting upon them in a most lucid manner, until the Doctor said he was entirely satisfied with those views. "Now," said he, "please let me know what you think of the free agency of man." With no less authority from Scripture, and no less potency of reason, he made this point equally satisfactory. "Now, Elder," said the Doctor, – "one more solution, and I shall be entirely satisfied – will you tell me how you reconcile these two great and important truths." "Doctor," said he, "there was once a mother, who, while busy with her needle, was teaching her daughter to read. The child at length came to a hard word, and asked her mother what it was. "Spell it, my child," said she. The child made an effort, but did not succeed. "Mother," said she, "I can't spell it." "Let me see it then." She handed her the book, and the mother, after puzzling over it for some time, returned it to the child and said, – "Skip it then."¹

God is sovereign, and humans are responsible. Both statements are true, but it's not our duty to reconcile them. But it is our duty to believe and embrace both. I'm so thankful for a congregation that is willing to wrestle with and work through the tough sections of Scripture. Preaching expositively, verse by verse, chapter by

¹ W. H. Spague, *Annals*, vol. 6, p. 238. Cited by Iain Murray, *Revival & Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1758* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1994, reprinted 2002), pp. 318-319.

chapter through books of the Bible is the best kind of preaching because it allows the text of Scripture to determine the shape and emphasis of the sermon. By going through God's word in this way, we get a balanced diet of Bible doctrine. Our current study in Romans is a terrific example of this. Whereas Romans 9 emphasizes the divine sovereignty, Romans 10 emphasizes human responsibility. The main point of verses 5-21 is wonderfully simple:

Salvation is yours if you want it.

That's why I have entitled today's sermon "Good News for All." Listen to God's word as it comes to us in Romans 10. I'll start by reading verses 5-13:

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."

- Romans 10:5-13

There's more to the chapter, but let's stop here to consider first *the message of salvation*.

1. The Message of Salvation (vv. 5-13)

At the end of chapter 9, Paul says that the Jews missed the way of salvation because they were pursuing a "law righteousness" based on works, rather than receiving the Lord's righteousness through faith in Christ. Romans 10:4 says, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

"Christ is the end of the law" in a two-fold sense. He is the end of the law in that he is the goal of the law. The purpose of the law was to show us our sin and point us to Jesus for salvation. Jesus is also the end of the law in that he fulfilled it for us.

That's true for *believers*. But what about *achievers*, i.e., those who try to attain their own righteousness by keeping the Ten Commandments and all the other stipulations of the Law of Moses? Well, Paul says that Moses himself wrote about both kinds of righteousness – the kind that comes by faith and the kind that comes by works.

In Romans 10:5, Paul quotes Moses' words in Leviticus 18:5, saying, "the person who does the commandments shall live by them." But for that happen, one would have to obey the law perfectly. Scripture says, "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it" (James 2:10). Far from showing us how holy we are, the law shows us how sinful we are! That's why Paul says in Romans 3:20, "by works of the law no human being will be justified in [God's] sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

Salvation is not the result of what we do for God but of what God has already done for us through Christ. It's all of grace. Even Moses knew this, and Paul proves it by quoting Moses' words in Deuteronomy. He begins with a warning: "But the righteousness based on faith says, 'Do not say in your heart...'" (Rom. 10:6a). The words "do not say in your heart" come from Deuteronomy 9:4-9, where God warns Israel not to presume that he gave them the land of Canaan because of their own righteousness. It had nothing to do with that because they were rebels just like the people from all the other nations. The land was a gift of God's grace. The same is true of salvation and all its inherent blessings. Salvation is God's gift to undeserving sinners like us.

In verses 6-8 of Romans 10, Paul quotes Moses' words in Deuteronomy 30:12-13. But Paul also inserts some "Christ-centered commentary"² in parentheses to show how accessible the gospel is. In the original context, Moses was emphasizing how accessible the word of God is. You don't have to reach up to heaven or cross the sea to get to it. It's right in front of you, waiting to be believed and obeyed.

But if that was true in Moses' day, how much more is it true now that Christ has come? The apostle John, who like Paul saw Jesus with his very own eyes, testified, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." (John 1:14). "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

So, now Paul uses Moses' language to point us to Jesus, who fulfilled the law on behalf of all who would believe in him. You don't have to reach up to heaven to get the message of salvation, because Christ already came down from heaven. You don't have to go down to the depths of the earth, because Christ has already been raised from the dead. Through his incarnation, death, burial and resurrection, Jesus has already achieved salvation for all who believe in him. As William Hendriksen put it, "The hard work was done by him, and therefore should not be attempted by us."³

Back when we lived in Massachusetts, when all five of our children were still young, we had a large, above-ground pool constructed in our back yard. I wanted to make sure that everything was done to code, so I had an electrician in our church install the wiring from the pool to the electrical panel in our home. He said he'd do it for free

² Daniel M. Doriani, *Romans*. Reformed Expository Commentary, eds Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021), p. 357.

³ William Hendriksen, *Romans*. New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1981, twelfth printing, 2007), p. 355.

if I would take care of digging a trench 20 inches deep from the pool to the house. It took me the better part of two weeks to dig that trench. All I had was a hand trowel, and it was thirty yards from the pool to the house, and our yard was full of rocks. I worked on that trench for hours every day until my hand were raw and blistered. It seemed like I would never get it done. Finally, at long last, I did. When the electrician came over to do the wiring, and he saw that I had dug the whole trench by hand, he said, "Why didn't you use a ditch witch?" I said, "What's a ditch witch?" He said, "It's an automated machine that's made specifically for digging little trenches. It could've dug this trench in no time."

Here I was, exhausting myself to do something that was far easier and less complicated than I had made it. Yet to a far greater extent, that's what people do when they try to achieve the righteousness that God requires for all who would enter into his kingdom. They strive for a standard that is not only difficult but impossible for us to attain – one that Jesus already accomplished for all who will trust in him. Christ fulfilled the Law through his perfect obedience, something none of us could never do. Plus, Jesus paid the penalty that we incurred for breaking God's law, when he died on the cross for our sins. God the Father showed that he approved of his Son's sacrifice by raising him from the dead. "Religious people, like the Jews of Jesus' time, have a tendency to complicate the matter of salvation."⁴

You don't have to scale the heights of heaven or plumb the depths of the earth to discover the way of salvation.

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. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

- Romans 10:9-10

After emphasizing salvation's *accessibility*, Paul emphasizes our *responsibility*. We confess with our mouths what we believe in our heart. The heart is the core of our being, and Jesus said, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). Paul uses a chiasm to emphasize how we receive God's salvation. Paul declared what we have to do and then repeats it in reverse order.

Confess with your mouth...
Believe in your heart....
You will be saved.
With the heart one believes...
With the mouth one confesses....

Paul begins and ends with confession, because true faith always leads to confession. To confess "Jesus is Lord" is to acknowledge that Jesus is God and has absolute

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness From Heaven*. Preaching the Word, edited by R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), p. 180.

ownership of my life. We confess Christ through baptism, that moment when we go public with our faith, in obedience to Jesus' command (Matt. 28:18-20). We confess Christ when we worship him publicly with his people, participating in all aspects of the worship service. We confess Christ when we conduct ourselves with integrity at work and school. We confess Christ when we share our testimony with others, telling them about Jesus and the difference he has made in our lives.

In Romans 10:11, Paul quotes Isaiah 28:16 again, to emphasize that *everyone* who trusts in Christ will never be put to shame, for he is the rock of our salvation. "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. For '*everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" Earlier in our service we sang, "I will call upon the Lord, for he alone is strong enough to save." Have you called on the Lord?

Here in these verses, Paul emphasizes the universal offer of the gospel. It's for all. It's for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord. To call on the Lord is to pray to Jesus in faith, believing that he is *able* to save you, is *willing* to save you, and *will surely* save you.

Most people are offended by that term "saved." They think, "I don't need to be 'saved.' I am not your *project*."⁵ But "saved" is a biblical term. It's the word God uses to describe what we need for him to do for us. Truth is, we all have sinned against God. We have rebelled against him and unless we call on him to save us, we will be rightly condemned by him on the Day of Judgment. The only way to be spared that judgment is if we come clothed in the righteousness of Christ by calling on him to save us. God in his great mercy extends this offer to everyone. All who call on him will be credited with the righteousness of Christ, just as our sins were counted against Jesus when he died on the cross. Those who believe in him, who call on his name, will be saved from the penalty of sin, the power of sin, and one day the very presence of sin when God will dwell with his people in a "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1).

God extends this offer of salvation to everyone today. Jesus has already done what God requires. All you must do is receive it by faith, "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" (Rom. 10:9). That's the *message of salvation*.

2. The Messengers of Salvation (vv. 14-15)

Our responsibility in relation to the gospel is not only to believe it and receive God's offer of salvation, but afterwards to tell the good news to others. Paul emphasizes this responsibility by asking four rhetorical questions in verses 14-15:

⁵ Doriani, 363.

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!”

Those words in verse 15 were first spoken (in Isaiah 52:7) about those who brought Jerusalem the good news that the days of captivity in Babylon were over. The message that Christians declare to the world is even better news because it has to do with God freeing us from our captivity to sin. To describe messengers’ feet as “beautiful” is ironic, because people typically wore leather sandals, so feet were rough and dirty. But feet that bring the good news of salvation are beautiful.

Jesus commanded his followers to go into all the world to proclaim the gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15). That’s why we commissioned Andrew and Anna Smith to go to Papua New Guinea – to help evangelists and pastors spread the gospel by flying them to the hard-to-reach areas. That’s why over 20 percent of our church budget is dedicated to supporting our missionaries in Papua New Guinea, India, Romania, Guatemala, Africa, Pakistan, and other places where people have yet to hear the good news of salvation.

Last summer, Ruthie and I had dinner with Dale and Carin LeRoy, who were sent out by Webster Bible Church decades ago as missionaries to Papua New Guinea. During our time together, Carin gave us her book newly published book titled *Where No Roads Go*. It’s a devotional biography about their missionary work and the lessons that God taught them along the way. Our staff is currently reading this book together and have been challenged and blessed by it. Inside the front cover, Carin wrote us a note, saying,

We are very grateful for the many prayers and faithful support from Webster Bible Church!! Without which these stories may have never happened, nor a small, remote tribe might have never believed or heard of the God who loved them. As your Uncle Ted used to say, “Keep pressing on.”

My Uncle Ted, who is now with the Lord, started the missions agency with whom the LeRoys serve because he wanted everyone to hear the gospel. Uncle Ted thought, “Why should some hear the life-giving message many times before some have even had the chance to hear it for the first time?” That’s the kind of thinking that occupied the mind of Paul and of the Lord Jesus himself. Scripture says,

Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages ... proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom.... When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “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.”

- Matthew 9:35-38

God calls those who have already believed the gospel to take the good news to others. We are to go where we can, give what we can, and pray hard for more workers. That’s how the gospel gets heard and believed. Carl Henry once said, “The gospel is only good news if it gets there in time.”

Sharing the good news of Jesus is our privilege and responsibility as believers. Now more than ever we must renew our commitment to the Great Commission, because according to Barna Research, “almost half of practicing Christian millennials say evangelism is wrong.” David Kinnaman, president of Barna Group, says this study highlights a need for Christians to bolster their confidence in certain convictions – among them, the belief that “evangelizing others is good and worthy of our time, energy and investment.” Kinnaman goes on to say,

we must persuade younger Christians that evangelism is an essential practice of following Jesus.... As much as ever, evangelism isn’t just about saving the unsaved, but reminding ourselves that this stuff matters, that the Bible is trustworthy and that Jesus changes everything.⁶

“But,” Paul says in Romans 10:16, they have not all obeyed the gospel.” That is the sad reality, which takes us to the third and final point of today’s lesson:

3. Those Missing Out on Salvation (vv. 16-21)

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 10:5-21

⁶ Barna, 5 February 2019 [online]. Retrieved on 24 March 2022 at <https://www.barna.com/research/millennials-oppose-evangelism/>.

In these final verses we see the tragic response of a rebellious people. This response was nothing new, for the people of Israel wouldn't listen back in Isaiah's day either. In verse 16 Paul quotes Isaiah's words, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" Do you know where this question appears in the book of Isaiah? At the start of chapter 53, where Isaiah goes on to provide a prophetic biography of Christ, specifically in relation to his rejection by men, his substitutionary death for sinners, his royal burial, his triumphant resurrection, and his eternal reward.

Isaiah was preaching the good news even in his day, seven centuries before the birth of Christ, but they didn't believe the gospel then, either. In verse 16, Paul equates *obeying* the gospel with *believing* the gospel. Both at the beginning of Romans and at the end, Paul calls this "the obedience of faith" (1:5; 16:26). Israel did not believe the gospel, therefore they did not obey the gospel.

In verse 17, Paul emphasizes the need for hearing. Do you see the connection? In verse 16, Paul said, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" In verse 17 Paul says, "So then, faith comes by *hearing*, and *hearing* through the word of Christ." In the previous paragraph, Paul emphasized our responsibility as believers to preach the good news to others. Now Paul emphasizes the responsibility of those who hear the good news to really hear it – to take it to heart.

Parents, when you tell your kids to do something and they don't respond as they should, you might say something like, "Did you hear what I said?" Nine times out of ten you know that they heard what you said. Your point in asking the question is to emphasize their duty to obey. That's what Paul is emphasizing here. Jesus did the same thing. In fact, "it would be difficult to discover any exhortation which he repeated more often ... than the one about hearing...."⁷

The word of God, the message of salvation – good news for all – is being preached to you this morning. Are you listening? Are you taking it to heart? Israel did not.

In verse 18, Paul quotes from Psalm 19:4, which is about the witness of creation. But Paul borrows the language of the psalmist to bear witness to the gospel – the idea being, "if God wants the world to know that he is the Creator, how much more must they know that Jesus is the Redeemer?"⁸

In verses 19-21, Paul quotes Moses (Deut. 32:21) and then Isaiah twice (65:1-2) to show that the problem was not ignorance or a lack of understanding on Israel's part. We know this because the Israelites became jealous of the Gentiles, whom they regarded as "a foolish nation." They didn't like the idea of them becoming God's people. In order for the Israelites to become angry, they must have understood what was happening, which means that they are therefore accountable. On this point Daniel Doriani writes,

⁷ Hendriksen, 351. See Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9; 23; 8:18; Luke 8:8, 18; 14:35; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 13:9.

⁸ Doriani, 375.

Pastorally speaking, when biblical teaching makes a listener angry, it often indicates that the person understands a message and dislikes it. That may not be the end of the matter, since the person is at least weighing the teaching – and that makes him or her accountable.⁹

Some of you experienced anger yourself or witnessed it in someone else as we made our way through Romans 9 and what it says about the sovereignty of God. But I thank God that you're sticking with it. You're thinking through these things. That's good, because all of us are accountable to God for what we hear and how we respond to his word.

God is sovereign, and we are responsible. God said of Israel, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people" (Rom. 10:21; Isa. 65:1-2). What will God say of you?

⁹ Doriani, 36.