



The hymn *I Am Bound for the Promised Land* compares our journey to heaven with Israel's journey to the Canaan. The lyrics were written by Samuel Stennett, who was an 18th century Baptist minister in England. (His father and grandfather were also pastors, and his grandfather was a hymn writer as well.) John Rippon, another English Baptist pastor (who was also the predecessor to Charles Spurgeon), published in 1787 *A Selection of Hymns from the Best Authors*. It included Stennett's hymn, which originally appeared under the heading, "Heaven Anticipated."

The hymn focuses not only on heaven but also the hymnwriter's desire for other people to join him on his journey. Did you catch the evangelistic emphasis in the chorus? "Oh, who will come and go with me? I am bound for the Promised Land."

The apostle Paul expresses such evangelistic zeal at the outset of Romans 10, when he says to believers regarding his fellow Jews, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they might be saved." This expressed desire on the part of Paul appears in the heart of our sermon text for today, Romans 9:30 – 10:4. Please follow along in your copy of the Scriptures as I read this text aloud. (It is on page 889 in the pew Bible, in the bottom right corner under the heading "Israel's Unbelief.") Beginning in chapter 9, verse 30, Paul writes,

³⁰ What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, ³³ as it is written,

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

10 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.

- Romans 9:30 – 10:4

Lord Jesus, in John 8:1 you declared to the people, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." So, we pray that your Holy Spirit will cause the light of the gospel of your glory to shine in our hearts. Show all of us the way of salvation and the path to eternal life. Amen.

Back in the mid-80s I attended a private Christian school in a suburb of Chicago. Every year the students participated in a fund-raising campaign for the school. My siblings and I did our best, but my parents still ended up with dozens of chocolate bars in their freezer. If the student body reached their quota of sales, then we got to take a day off from our classes and do something special. One year we went to UNO's Pizzeria in downtown Chicago for lunch. (This was the original UNO's, before the restaurant became franchised.) After lunch we went to Wrigley Field to watch a Cubs' game. During the game, one of the batters hit a high pop foul that was coming right toward our group. Most of us were scrambling to get into place to catch the ball. Some had even brought their ball gloves. I was right there among them jostling for position, hoping to catch the ball. It bounced in an empty row and landed two seats in front of me – right into my sister's lap. The funny thing is, she was turned to the side talking to her friend. She wasn't even watching the game!

“It is possible to obtain great benefits without looking for them.”¹ This can happen at a sporting event, but it can also happen spiritually, which is infinitely better. In Matthew 13, Jesus said,

“God's kingdom is like a treasure hidden in a field ... and then accidentally discovered by a trespasser. The finder is ecstatic – what a find! – and proceeds to sell everything he owns ... and buy[s] that field.

- Matthew 13:44 MSG

That's similar to the picture Paul presents at the end of Romans 9. Salvation came to the Gentiles, like that baseball came to my sister – when she wasn't looking for it. But the Jews did not get what they were straining for – just like my friends and I didn't get the baseball we were after. “Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works” (Rom. 9:32).

Up until this point in Romans 9, Paul has been affirming God's sovereignty in salvation. God's sovereignty is so strongly emphasized by Paul, that he anticipates certain questions and objections that naturally arise, like “is there injustice with God?” (v. 14) and “why does he find fault? For who can resist his will?” (v. 19) Paul answers these objections by underscoring that God has the final say and we don't. We have no more right to question God's integrity or his freedom to do what he wishes with his creation, any more than a lump of clay would have the right to say to the Potter who shaped it, “What are you doing?”

The doctrine of sovereign election “is a marvelous doctrine to be believed, though we cannot fully understand it.”² But now as we come to the end of Romans 9 and transition into chapter 10, we see the other side of the coin:

¹ Daniel M. Doriani, *Romans*. Reformed Expository Commentary, eds Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021), p. 345.

² R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness From Heaven*. Preaching the Word, edited by R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991), p. 177.

human responsibility. Scripture teaches that God is sovereign, and people are responsible. How these two realities relate to one another we cannot comprehend. They may seem contradictory, but they are compatible. Scripture teaches both. Therefore, we must believe both and live accordingly.

This is important, because, as Kent Hughes' said, "it is possible for us to get just enough of the vertical theology of chapter 9 to make us horizontally irresponsible."³ Some Christians don't tell others about Jesus, because they have misapplied the doctrine of election, thinking that their evangelistic efforts don't really matter. And some unbelievers have yet to receive the blessings of salvation, because they're caught up in wondering whether or not they're elect, instead of simply trusting Jesus to save them.

We humans like the idea of being in charge while at the same time absolving ourselves of responsibility. "Will Rogers once remarked that there are two eras in American history – the passing of the buffalo and the passing of the buck."⁴ But God holds people responsible for their choices. God rejected Israel because Israel rejected the gospel. They refused to believe and receive Jesus as their Messiah. Multiple times throughout chapter ten, the responsibility of Israel is emphasized. The chapter ends with the LORD saying of Israel, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

The Lord continues to hold out his hands today, offering salvation to everyone. If you are not saved, it is because you're rejecting Christ. Paul concludes chapter 9 and transitions into chapter 10 with this vital truth:

***To be right with God,
you must bank on Jesus.***

This is *your* responsibility. This truth applies to all people everywhere – Jew and Gentile, men and women, rich and poor, black and white, religious and non-religious. So, let's walk through the text, trusting the Holy Spirit to teach us this vital truth and apply it to our lives.

1. The Faith of the Gentiles (Rom. 9:30)

"What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is a righteousness that is by faith" (Rom. 9:30). In other words, the Gentiles found salvation when they weren't even looking for it – just like my sister found that baseball in her lap despite being preoccupied with other things.

This doesn't mean that Gentiles have no moral scruples whatsoever, that they are as wicked as wicked can be. When Paul says that they did not pursue right-

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

eousness, he's talking about righteousness *from God*. Paul has already talked this in Romans 3, where he says,

²¹ But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. ²² We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

- Romans 3:21-22 NLT

The Gentiles received the righteousness of God when they weren't even looking for it. Talk about sovereign grace! We see this in the book of Acts when Paul and Barnabas go on their first missionary journey. They travel through various regions, including Pisidia (in modern Turkey) and come to the Roman colony of Antioch, where they preach the gospel in the synagogue. By "the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord (Acts 13:44). Then we read,

⁴⁵ But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. ⁴⁶ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. ⁴⁷ For so the Lord has commanded us, saying,

"I have made you a light for the Gentiles,
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth."

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.

- Acts 13:45-48

Here we see both human responsibility – the Jews revile, the Gentiles rejoice – and divine sovereignty: "as many as were appointed to eternal life believed."

Going back to Romans 10, we see that just as the Gentiles found what they weren't looking for, the Jews weren't able to find what they were looking for.

2. The Failure of the Jews (9:31 – 10:3)

To capture the flow of the text and the contrast being made between the Gentiles and the Jews, let's re-read Romans 9:31 and then read the rest of the sentence in verse 32:

³⁰ What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.

- Romans 9:31-32

Paul is using racecourse imagery to communicate his point. The contrast is interesting because Paul says that the Gentiles “did not pursue righteousness” whereas the Jews “pursued” – not righteousness – “but a law that would lead to righteousness.” That phrase is just two words in Greek: “law righteousness” (νομον δικαιοσύνης). The “law” is the law of Moses, and “righteousness” is a right standing with God.

But, Paul says, Israel “did not succeed in reaching that law.” The word “reach” (*phthanō*) means “to attain an object of pursuit.” It can also mean “to arrive.” Daniel Doriani writes, “In effect, the Jews hopped on the righteousness train, but only the Gentiles pulled into the station.”⁵

a. the reason

“Why?” Paul asks in 32. “Because they [the Jews] did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame’ (Rom. 9:32-33). To Israel, Jesus became a “stumbling stone” and a “rock of offense” because they refused to believe in him as God’s “precious cornerstone,” as Peter says (1 Pet. 2:7-8).

Last week we went out to dinner to celebrate one of our boys’ birthdays. As we were driving down Route 252 in Henrietta, which has multiple lanes of traffic, we saw a man to our left looking to cross the road. Right when he started to run, he tripped over something right in front of him and almost fell face down on the road. He was so focused on where he was trying to get to, that he missed what was right in front of him – and could have lost his life as a result.

In the same way, Israel was so focused on keeping the law, that they stumbled over the very one to whom the law pointed. In verse 33, Paul quotes Isaiah 8:14 and 28:16 to complete the picture that he has been presenting of a racecourse and to show that Israel’s failure was predicted because it was part of God’s plan. God is sovereign, and humans are responsible. Both statements are true and must be held in proper tension.

In their pursuit of “law righteousness,” Israel stumbled over the Lord himself – the Rock of salvation – the very one to whom the law pointed. They rejected Jesus because they were focused on *achieving* instead of *believing*. Remember what Paul stated back in chapter 3 of Romans?

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his [God’s] sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

- Rom. 3:20

⁵ Daniel M. Doriani, *Romans*. Reformed Expository Commentary, eds. Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021), p. 345.

The purpose of the Law was to expose our sin and point us to Jesus as the way of salvation. But the Jews missed it because they tried to achieve righteousness by good works instead of receiving God's righteousness by believing in Christ. God sent his Son Jesus to live a life of perfect obedience on our behalf and to suffer the punishment that we deserved on account of our sin. God showed his approval of Jesus' perfect life and atoning death by raising him from the dead.

To use the race imagery, the people of "Israel were running strenuously, but they were not heading towards the true finishing line of the race. That finishing line is the righteousness that comes from God"⁶ through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. Israel failed because they tried to *achieve* righteousness by their *works* instead of *receiving* it by *faith*.

After stating the *reason* for Israel's failure at the end of chapter 9, Paul expresses his *response* at the beginning of chapter 10.

b. Paul's response

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. 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.

- Romans 10:1-3

Paul used to be in the same boat as his fellow Israelites. For years he tried to pursue his own righteousness through the law, but he counted all that as rubbish once he discovered the precious worth of Christ. Paul gave up pursuing his own righteousness and received the righteousness of God that comes through faith in Christ. Now he prayed that his fellow Jews would do the same.

Paul believes in predestination, but he also believes in prayer – because “prayer is one of the means God has ordained to accomplish his purposes.”⁷ In fact, as the unfolding argument will show, Paul's prayer for the salvation of Israel is based on the irrevocable promise of God that he will ultimately save Israel (11:26).⁸ The word of God produces faith in God, strengthens faith in God, and stimulates prayer to God!

Many of you are familiar with “Morning & Evening,” the well-known devotional book written by the 19th century pastor Charles Spurgeon. He wrote another devotional

⁶ Douglas J. Moo, “Romans.” *New Bible Commentary*, 21st century edition, edited by G. J. Wenham, J. A. Motyer, D. A. Carson and R. T. France (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1994, reprinted 2010), p. 1145.

⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, second edition, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, eds. Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), p. 529.

⁸ *Ibid.*

book titled “Faith’s Checkbook.” He wrote in the introduction that we are not simply to read God’s promises in Scripture and lay them aside. Instead, we are to treat God’s promises as a reality, as we would treat a check. Spurgeon says that we endorse it with our own name by personally receiving it as true. We then “take it to the bank” by going to God in prayer, believing that he will be true to his Word. Now we must be careful not to take Scripture out of context, like so many of the “name it & claim it” preachers on television. They’re false teachers because they misappropriate God’s Word to suit their own selfish desires. But God’s Word, rightly understood and applied is like endorsing a check and taking to the bank to be cashed. If you fail to endorse the check by taking it as true for you, you get nothing. And if you’re too lazy to take it to the bank by going to God in prayer, you’ll also get nothing. That is not the fault of the promise but of the person who fails to lay hold of it.

I want you to think about this as we cover the third and final point of today’s sermon. So far we have considered the faith of the Gentiles and the failure of Israel. Now let us reiterate the fact of the gospel.

3. The Fact of the Gospel (Rom. 10:4)

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4). The Greek word for “end” is *telos*, which can mean “termination,” as in “His retirement marked the *end* of a great career.”⁹ (When I was in seminary memorizing New Testament Greek vocabulary, I remembered the definition for *telos* by saying, “*Telos* [Tell us] the end of the story.” Now you’ll remember the meaning of *telos*! By now some of you are thinking, “*Telos* the end of the sermon!”) That’s one meaning of *telos* – the termination of end of something. But *telos* can also signify a “goal,” as in, “She was aiming to score well on her SAT. To that end, she studied every evening.”

Sometimes in Greek as well as English, both meanings for “end” might fit the same context. I was thinking about this as I walked home from church on Thursday. My home was the *end* of my walk. It was the *termination* of my walk since I stopped walking once I got there, but it was also the *goal* of my walk, since I made my way up Holt Road and John Glenn Boulevard in order to get there.

Both meanings also fit with Romans 10:4. “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” First, the law reaches its goal in Christ since its purpose was to expose our sin and point us to Jesus for salvation. At the same time, Christ is the end of the law because his coming ended that era of salvation history. In Galatians 3, Paul says, “the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian” (vv. 24-25 NIV). Tom Schreiner correctly states, “The result of Christ being the goal and end of the law is that now right standing with God is available for all who put their faith and trust in him.”¹⁰ In other words ...

⁹ Doriani, 350.

¹⁰ Schreiner, 532.

***To be right with God,
you must bank on Jesus.***

Remember Spurgeon's analogy of the checkbook. Have you endorsed God's promise of salvation by receiving it as true for you? Later in this chapter, in verse 13, Paul says, "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." That is God's promise. Will you take it to the bank by believing in the Lord Jesus, asking him to save you?

Christian, what about you? Do you suffer from gospel amnesia, forgetting that God accepts you because of what Christ did for you rather than what you do for him? Do you lean on Jesus and his righteousness daily? Daniel Doriani writes,

Morality and religiosity kill spiritual life unless grounded in the gospel. ... Moral and religious activity are like radiation – very dangerous unless properly contained. The gospel is the container that lets us put morality and religious deeds to good use.¹¹

Salvation is found in Christ alone. By confessing our sins and preaching the gospel to ourselves every day, "we think less of ourselves and more of Jesus. ... Jesus is the end of the law because he fulfilled it, he is the end of the law's penalty because he paid it, and he is the end of the law because our failures lead us to him."¹²

¹¹ Doriani, 352.

¹² Ibid.