

All Roads Lead Here: How Can I Be Saved?
By Jason Huff
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Deuteronomy 30:11-20; Joel 2:28-32; Romans 10:1-13

Our final Scripture reading today is Romans 10:1-13. May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word. “Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."”

A lot of games are sold on the phrase, “A minute to learn, a lifetime to master.” If you think about games like chess or Scrabble or the ancient Asian game Go – they aren’t that difficult. In Scrabble, you form words out of letters you draw out of a pile. Chess pieces always move the same way and are easy to remember. Go is simply a game of laying down tiles. You can spend years studying chess and never become a grandmaster, but the concepts are so simple that an eight-year-old can understand how to play.

What Paul discusses in Romans 10 today is much the same. Paul can be hard to understand at times; he can be very heady. We conquered some of his hardest concepts in Romans 9. But understanding Christianity and being a Christian is very simple. It’s not easy – we never master being like Jesus in this lifetime, not even close. But a child can grasp what it means to believe in Jesus and to be saved by Him.

Last week, we learned that the Gentiles came into God’s Kingdom at the same time that the Jewish people began rejecting it as they rejected Jesus. That rejection grieved Paul because they’re his people – Paul was a Pharisee, a Jew among Jews, before Jesus got ahold of him and turned him around. As he starts today, he repeats himself – his heart’s desire and prayer is for the people of Israel to be saved by God. But as Paul writes this letter, a lot of them aren’t followers of Jesus. A lot of them are outside the Kingdom. We talked about why a little bit last week, but now we’re going to see even more of the problem.

Paul testifies that his kinsmen were zealous for God, but their zeal wasn't based on knowledge. They were working hard, in pursuit of God. They were more concerned with God than many Christians are today. And they had the Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, the testimony of the law and the prophets right in front of them. What knowledge there was of God was there for them to discover.

But that's the problem: they didn't. Paul says this: "Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness." First, they didn't know the righteousness that comes from God because they misread the real meaning of the Scripture and the Law.

Here's how I describe it...maybe you remember reading a book in high school or college and you understood the plot, but then the teacher told you what the book was really about and you were like, "I didn't get that at all." *The Great Gatsby* isn't so much about its characters and their lavish lifestyles as it is the hopelessness of the American Dream. *Lord of the Flies* is a study in how society and leadership work as much as it's about boys surviving in a world where there are no parents. Lots of stories have a deeper meaning you have to search for.

And that's true of the Law of God too. The Jews of Jesus' day determined that if they kept the law completely, they could be righteous. Yet the scribes and scholars had lengthy debates trying to figure out ways around the law – how they could break the Sabbath, steal, and do all sorts of things that broke the spirit of the law. They weren't interested so much in knowing God as they were finding ways to "get ahead in life" and also been seen as good people.

But every day, the one prayer every Jewish person prayed is from the law, found in Deuteronomy 6: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Every day, they repeated the part of the law that should have showed them their deficiency. Every day, they heard those words they were supposed to carry out: love God with *all* your heart, *all* your soul, *all* your strength.

This should have triggered a spiritual crisis because no matter who you are, you can't do that! It's impossible to keep. It should have helped them see that keeping the law was beyond their reach. God's deeper purpose in the law was to show us that the only way to be righteous is to trust in Him and His mercy and righteousness and not ourselves and our lawkeeping. But they didn't do that, so they missed God's righteousness.

Second issue: instead of recognizing the problem, they created their own system of laws that they thought would make them righteous. They came up with a huge list of traditions and rules far larger than the law of Moses. Keep those, they said, and God must be pleased with you. But here's the problem with that – even though they kept *their* law, because they no longer kept God's law, they were no longer righteous according to *God*.

Think about it this way: to be right with someone means you follow their rules. We understand the gist of most American laws. But if you go overseas, you've got to know their laws. For example, it's against the law in Singapore to chew gum. In France, if you're driving a car, you are required to have a portable Breathalyzer in the vehicle. It's their country, their rules. You can follow American rules all you want, but it won't keep you from getting arrested in Singapore or France if you break theirs.

In the same way, the Jewish religious authorities spent hundreds of years creating and debating their own version of the law called the Mishnah. It told the Jewish people how to live – how to eat, how to work, how to dress. It was much more thorough than the law God gave to Moses. There's just one problem. It wasn't God's law. They could be righteous by their own standards by keeping the Mishnah. But it didn't make them right with God. And that was the problem. They thought they were on track, but they were far from it. The sinners – the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the thieves – they understood Jesus better than the religious leaders because they knew they weren't right with God. They knew they needed grace because they knew they weren't righteous.

Paul moves on to describe exactly what happens with Jesus. He writes, "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." The word "end" here in the Greek can also be translated "fulfillment." Jesus through His sinless life followed the law completely, so He completes it, fulfills it, and supersedes it. No one ever needs to look at the Old Testament law and say, "I am going to have to do all these things to be accepted by God." The mercy that was hinted at in the Old Testament, the idea that God will be gracious to those who turn to Him in trust rather than to rely on themselves, is made transparent in Jesus. When we trust in Jesus, we receive His righteousness as our own.

Our two Scripture readings from the Old Testament today are what Paul references next. Paul contrasts the law with the good news of Jesus and the righteousness that comes by faith in Him. "Moses describes righteousness that is by the law this way: "The man who does these things will live by them.'" Moses promised the Israelites they would live well if they fulfilled the law. But as history proved, they didn't, they couldn't. No one fulfilled the law, so death came to everyone.

But Paul interprets Moses a new way. He says, "The righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart." When Moses wrote those words, he was telling the Israelites that the law was essentially simple. They didn't have to storm the gates of heaven or Sheol to get the law. It was clearly presented to them and now they simply had to obey.

But Paul says that Jesus makes it even easier than that. The hidden mystery of the Law – that it exists to point us to saving faith in God and in His son Jesus rather than ourselves – is now revealed in Jesus. We don't have to be superheroes striving to get into the Kingdom by lifting ourselves up by our bootstraps. Instead, saving faith comes simply through belief, not by our achievements. And God is near us in Christ, not far away.

Paul goes on to explain more: “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” That is the gospel, the good news, in a nutshell. That’s the part that takes a lifetime to master but just a few moments to understand.

How can I be saved? It is simple – confess with your words that Jesus is Lord. Believe that He is who He says He is, and believe that He was raised to life after dying for our sins. Put your trust in Him and not in yourself, and God will raise you to life on the last day. As Paul puts it, “it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”

Now this is not some sort of easy, one-and-done, “say a prayer in front of somebody and mean it” sort of thing. It’s actually very simple to be a Christian...so simple, in fact, that a lot of people reject it on that point alone. It’s simple, but it takes something impossible to do without God’s help and interference and calling – dying to ourselves and dying to the sinful desire we have to try and save ourselves. It’s simple to understand, and the initial action is simple to do, but it’s also a lifetime work.

Christianity is not about something you did a long time ago. It isn’t about your baptism when you were a child or a prayer you prayed in your youth or a commitment you made a while after that to follow Jesus. It’s about now. The verbs “confess” and “believe” in the Greek are actions without a definite start or end point – they aren’t officially complete until our lives are over, when *we* are past tense. It’s never just a question of “did you confess?” or “did you believe?” but “do you confess?” and “do you believe?” Our salvation is past, present, and future. We were saved; we are being saved; we will be saved. It’s ongoing. If you sometimes wonder about your salvation as we all occasionally do, the question is not if your faith *was* real, but if it’s real now, that’s what counts.

Paul describes saving faith as more than just an intellectual exercise; it’s more than mere agreement to facts. It’s also more than outward saying, “I believe.” It involves the heart, the core of belief, that trust that goes beyond logic and beyond just what we say and begins to affect every part of what we do. But it’s also not hard in the sense of it being beyond us.

If God has put it on your heart to accept Jesus, confessing Him and believing Him and acting on it becomes a part of you. It will be difficult and complicated at times; it requires all of you. But you don’t ever have to worry that you’re missing it. You can rest safe in the knowledge that if you truly believe, God has you safe in His hand, and if you truly believe, that belief is never going to leave. It will always be there.

Paul ends this section with incredible reassurance for us. Quote: “As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile -- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.””

In our racially charged world today, these words should ring out to us. Because as bad as our current racial tensions can be, they were nothing like the ancient world where different ethnicities and races stayed at war with each other for centuries, where racial purity and hatred of outsiders was taught by most nations. But Jesus changes all that. Jesus doesn't belong to any one people or ethnicity or race. Jesus' salvation comes to anyone who trusts in Him. The ancient Jews believe that you had to become a Jew in order to gain the promises of God. But in Jesus, anyone who calls upon the Lord in faith and trust will be saved. He is the Lord of all tribes, all cultures, and all civilizations.

And while it may be difficult to live faithfully as a Christian, it is well worth it, because God richly blesses all who call upon Him. Think of just the blessings we've experienced in this room. You are my friends – friends I wouldn't have if it weren't for Jesus. You are close to Catha and the boys and me not because we share the same interests or follow the same ball teams or watch the same movies. We aren't close because we're all the same age or have the same life experiences. We are family brought together by Jesus. Despite our differences, we know each other, we care about each other, we pray for one another, maybe more than some of our own flesh and blood do. We are blessed just by knowing one another.

And that's just the start of the blessings. We are blessed because we know that, just by having faith in Jesus that He will sort things out, by trusting in Him and not in ourselves, by believing that He did return from the dead after paying the debt of our sins against God, we will spend eternity with Him. We are blessed that no matter what happens on this earth, we don't need to fear what comes next. When we get to eternity, we won't be ashamed because we won't have to look back on our lives and see how often we blew it and disobeyed God's ways and see that our attempts were futile. We'll not be ashamed because when God sees us, He will see us wearing the righteousness of Jesus that has been given to us, and He will count it as our own.

My friends, I don't have points this week to remember or concepts to try out at home. There's really nothing profound or mysterious in this week's passage. There's just that one simple core at the root of Christianity – "if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

If you don't really know who Jesus is, I'd encourage you to read your Bible, especially the gospels that tell about His life, that give us His teachings, that show His mercy on so many people as He went throughout Israel healing and preaching. Talk to Him; He is there and will hear you. If you have questions, talk to me and I can help you know Him better as your Savior and Lord and friend. Trust in Him, rely on Him, and your life will change – not for the easier, but for the better, and not just now but always.