

The Message Concerning Faith

Rom 9:30-10:21

KV 10:9, “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Faith is the most important aspect of both our physical and our spiritual lives. The Bible defines faith in Heb 11:1, “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” Our physical lives are built upon faith. We have faith that when we sit down in our chairs they won’t break and send us to the ground. We have faith in our friends and family, so we share experiences and some of our personal belongings with one another. We have faith that when we pay for goods and services, the company is behaving ethically and honestly. Our physical lives are built upon our spiritual lives, so as important as faith is to our physical lives, it is even more important spiritually. Spiritually, faith is the difference between life and death. Heb 11:6 says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe he exists and rewards those who earnestly seek him.” People can put their faith in other things, but the truth is, only one faith can save your soul. Only faith in the one true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ will be able to save you. With that understanding, we can narrow spiritual faith down to two categories: faith in God, or unbelief. Through this passage, Paul talks about the unbelief of Israel, but also about the salvation God brings through faith in Jesus Christ. First we’ll look at the foundation of faith, next, the message concerning faith, and finally, the source of faith – and through this may we prove and see that only faith in God saves, and find encouragement to call on the name of God.

Part I: The Foundation of Faith

In last week’s passage, we learned about the sovereignty of God, and his great compassion and mercy on people who were not his own. Paul quotes Hosea in Ch.9:25, “I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people; and I will call her ‘my loved one’ who is not my loved one.” Originally, God had chosen the people of Israel to be his people. Everyone else, or in other words the Gentiles, were not God’s chosen people. They were looked down on by the Israelites, considered to be dogs. They had no love for God in their hearts, they served idols and lived in sin. But God in his great mercy, called them his very own. So Paul opens with a question – look at v.30-31, “What then shall we say?” – and he makes an observation, “That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as a way of righteousness, have not attained their goal.” The goal here is righteousness. It means to be acceptable, to be good – not according to our standards, but according to God’s standards. God is perfect, holy and good, and according to his standards, we also must be perfect and holy and good. But who of us can say we are perfect? The righteousness that we receive is given entirely by the grace and mercy of God.

How can we know God’s standard? It was given through God’s law. That’s why the law was so precious, because it shows us what pleases God. But the law is also convicting, because it shows us that we can never obey it fully. The law says, “Do not murder,” but Jesus says even if you are angry with your brother you will be subject to judgment. The law says, “Do not commit adultery,” but Jesus says even if you look at a woman lustfully, you have already committed adultery in your heart. We will never be righteous if we try to pursue the

requirements of the law, because we break the law every day of our lives. That is why the Israelites did not receive righteousness, because they pursued it not by faith, but as if it were by works. In order to be righteous we need to obey the whole law, but we cannot do this with our own strength.

Paul says they stumbled over the stumbling stone, and quotes a scripture from Isaiah: “See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.” There is a stumbling stone in Zion that makes people fall – and this is not just a fall onto the floor, it’s a fall into judgment and condemnation. The secret to this stumbling block was faith – that whoever believes will never be put to shame. This stumbling block represents Jesus Christ, and the Israelites fell because they did not believe in him. Think about this today – how many people do you know do not believe in Christ? Chances are, for most of us, most of the people that we can think of do not believe in Jesus. Jesus is offensive to many people, especially today, people will say Jesus was made up, or a fairy tale, or that Christians who profess the name of Jesus are intolerant and hateful. The Israelites refused to accept Jesus because he was not their idea of a Messiah. They wanted a Messiah that would establish Israel as a world power, and they despised the idea of a suffering Savior who came to die. When Jesus declared the truth to them, that he was the Son of God, they gnashed their teeth at him, and plotted to kill him.

The Israelites did this because they had zeal for God, but no knowledge. Zeal means to have great energy and enthusiasm for something. They had a great enthusiasm for God, and tried to follow all his laws carefully – but by doing so they became blind to God. They became so consumed and concerned with breaking their laws and their traditions, that even when God came, fulfilling the law but violating their man-made laws, they desired to have him killed. Jesus healed people on the Sabbath day, which was lawful, but the Israelites considered that a breaking of their rules and wanted to condemn Jesus. Paul had a great heart for the Israelites, and describes it in v.1-3, “Brothers and sisters, 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 of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.” They sought their own righteousness by trying to pursue the law, but they could never obey the whole law.

So how can the law be fulfilled? How can righteousness be met? If the Jews, who had the law, could not find righteousness through it, where does righteousness come from? Look at v.4, “Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the law. Through his perfect and sinless life, he obeyed all of God’s commandments all of his days, from childhood into adulthood. When Christ came into the world, he said in Heb 10:7 “Here I am – it is written about me in the scroll – I have come to do your will, my God.” Jesus has come to do all of God’s will in perfect obedience, something we could never do. Jesus also fulfilled the law for us by dying for our sins. The law requires that death is the penalty for our sins. He met that requirement as well by dying on the cross for our sins. Christ is the culmination of the law – he was predestined before the foundations of the earth to fulfill the law for us. We were never meant to fulfill the law. The law was never meant for us to be a means of attaining righteousness. The law was given to show us how short we fall from the glory of God, and then to point us to the righteousness of God,

who is Jesus Christ. And because Jesus was God, he is able to win salvation not just for a few, but for everyone who believes.

Think back to the illustration of the stumbling block. It said that the one who believes in him will never be put to shame. 1 Peter 2:4,5 and 8, tell us “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone...As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” This stumbling block has become the cornerstone on which the church of God is built. Through Christ, we were chosen by God and precious to him, and being built up into a spiritual house to worship God. Just as the cornerstone is the foundation to a building, so Christ is the foundation of our faith.

Part II: The Message Concerning Faith

In v.5-8, it looks like we have 2 characters speaking to us – one is the righteousness by the law and the other is the righteousness by faith. In v.5, “Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: ‘The person who does these things will live by them.’” The requirement is, that in order to live, we need to obey everything in the law every day, or else we die. We cannot attain righteousness by the law. So another character speaks, look at v.6-7, “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 from the dead).” These verses are partly a quotation from Deut 30, when Moses was near the end of his life – he encouraged the Israelites to take heart in obeying the Lord’s commands. Moses says, “Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, ‘Who will ascend to heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so that we may obey it...No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.” The Israelites did not need to travel far to get the knowledge of God’s commands, but it would be close to them. When Moses spoke these words, they applied to the law, because during his time Christ has not come to fulfill the law yet.

But in these verses, Paul applies them to the righteousness that is by faith. [Just to make sure this is understood – Moses wrote these verses before Jesus, Paul quoted them after Jesus] So, we do not have to go into heaven to get the righteousness of God (if we could even go there). We do not have to go into the deep to get the righteousness of God from there (if we could even go there). Actually, God has done that for us too! Jesus came down from heaven, and God raised him up from the dead to bring us the knowledge of Christ. So now I have some good news. I have some great news. Salvation is not far from you! It’s not hiding up there in heaven, or lost down there in hell. You don’t need a PhD to be saved – you don’t even need a Bachelor’s. Look at v.8, “But what does it [the righteousness by faith] say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim.” The kingdom of heaven is near, salvation is very near.

Again, what are these words? They are the message concerning faith. This is the faith that leads to salvation – can we all please read v.9-10, “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart 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 profess your faith and are saved.” Verse 10 shows how faith works. It begins with a belief in the heart, and it is in the heart that when you believe, you are justified. To be justified means to be declared as righteous before God. Look – there’s nothing you need to do at this point. You don’t need to give anyone money. You don’t need to recite some book of prayers. You believe in your heart that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and you are justified. God has wiped your slate clean. He has balled up your list of sins, and threw them away, as far as the east is from the west. He stamps you with a seal of approval: “Justified by faith in Jesus Christ.” And the whole time he is smiling, and heaven rejoices over another sinner who repents of their unbelief (Luke 15:7).

Then, out of the overflow of your heart, you confess, “Jesus is Lord.” Yes, Jesus is Lord. He was God. No, He IS God. The heart says, “God, I repent. I repent of my unbelief for all these years. I repent of my sin and rebellion against you, for you made me and gave me life. I repent that I did not treat you as God, the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth, the Almighty, my Lord and Savior. I repent for my unbelief and consequent rebellion against you. I repent that I doubted your kindness, your love and your mercy as you gave your One and only Son for me. You are good, Lord, you are good, God, worthy of all honor, glory and praise.” And the end result is the same – you are saved. You are saved from the penalty of all your sins, which means you have been pardoned and saved from the judgment and wrath of God to come to the world. You have also been saved from the power of sin. Sin no longer has a hold on you. Break free from your pornography addiction. Break free from your alcohol addiction. Break free from your secret sins. Though you may be tempted, when you flee to Christ, your Lord and Savior, sin cannot touch you.

The Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” There shall never be any shame once you become a Christian. Perhaps the world may taunt you or make fun of you for being a Christian – but shame on them, not shame on you. 1 Pet 2:19, “For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God.” God sees you and knows, and if you bear under it, you will be commended for it by God, for his name sake. At the last days, when he comes again, you will not be put to shame, nor be put to shame for all eternity.

We need lots of grace from God as we desire to live holy lives pleasing to him, and face the temptations of this world – but there is an encouragement in v.12-13: “For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses those who call on him, for “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” This is an encouragement both for the Christian and the non-Christian. For both, the Lord will richly bless those who call on him. Eph 2:6-7 says, “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” Eph 3:16 – “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.” Just as Christ has more than enough righteousness for everyone who believes, God has more than enough riches to grant to those who call on his name. And for the non-Christian, there is a hope for him who believes, for again it says in v.13, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” That name is Jesus Christ. The message concerning faith we

proclaim is: If you declare with your mouth “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Part III: The Source of Faith

When we follow v.14-17, we find ourselves working backwards to find the origin, or source of faith. The great promise from v.13 is, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” So Paul asks, “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?” That’s true, how can you call on God, if you don’t believe in him? Then, “how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?” Yes, true again, how would they know what to believe in? Then, “how can they hear without someone preaching to them?” This gets interesting. This is the first time preaching is mentioned here – but it is the predecessor to hearing. Indeed preaching is God’s method to save sinners. 1 Cor 1:21-23 “For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” We can do several things to try and get people into church, but let’s remember the most effective and only effective way to truly save is to preach Christ and him crucified. The message is simple: Christ and the cross. And you don’t have to be a preacher in a pulpit – but by that same declaration: where you believed in your heart God raised Jesus from the dead and confessed, “Jesus is Lord,” make that same declaration to others.

Then, how can anyone preach unless they are sent? This is true. In Luke 10 Jesus appointed 72 people and sent them out 2 by 2 to heal the sick and tell them: “The kingdom of God has come near to you.” So Paul ends with this beautiful quote: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” In Eph 6:14-15, when describing the armor of God it says, “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.” With few exceptions, God uses people to go and preach to others to spread the gospel and advance his kingdom, bringing more souls in for his glory. I believe almost all of us here at one point or another were blessed by the beautiful feet of someone who brought us the good news, and may we fit our feet with the readiness of the gospel to IIT and beyond.

In these last few verses, Paul refers back again to the unbelief of the Israelites. He says in v.16, “But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our message?’” From here we find the source of faith, can we all read v.17, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.” The source of faith comes from hearing the message. Again, the message is the word about Christ – his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead. There may be different gospels preached, but if it is not about Christ and him crucified, it may be a false gospel. It may be, for example, a message on God’s desire to bless you, and make you happy, healthy and wealthy. But they might not tell you the whole truth. You may never hear about the judgment of God for the sins of this world, and feel a need for a Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ. But the true gospel, the gospel of Christ, him crucified and resurrected is like a seed planted in someone’s heart, but it’s God who will make it grow.

But what about the Israelites? Did they not hear? From v.18-21, we see that the gospel was preached to all the ends of the world. Of course they must have heard. Israel also understood the message. Verse 19 says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding." Then Isaiah boldly says in v.20, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." Israel has been disobedient, so God provoked them to envy and anger. Israel continued to be disobedient when the gospel was preached to them, so God called those who did not ask for him. In Acts 14:42-47, when Paul and Baranabas were preaching at a synagogue, the Jews became filled with jealousy and contradicted everything they said, "We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles." Israel has been a disobedient and obstinate people, but God has held out his hand to them all day long. Jesus lamented in Matt 23:37, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."

Where did Israel go wrong, and what can we learn from them? Remember the chain of faith: someone is sent, that person preaches, the other person hears, then believes, then calls on the Lord, and then is saved. Someone was sent to Israel, someone preached the gospel to them, and they heard. But that's where the chain was broken. They did not believe. And if they did not believe, they cannot call on the Lord. And if they cannot call on the Lord, they will not be saved. When we hear the gospel, it must be combined with faith, and by faith, we may call on the Lord and be saved.

In conclusion, there are only two categories: faith and unbelief – only by faith in Jesus Christ and God the Father, can we be saved from our sins and given eternal life and glory with Christ. The foundation of our faith is Jesus Christ. The message is to believe in him. And the source of faith comes from hearing the message. We have a responsibility to believe, and to declare what we believe. May we also make our feet beautiful to share the gospel, that many more may call on the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ, and be saved!