

Faith Comes From Hearing the Message

Romans 10:5-17 (NIV)

⁵ Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them." ⁶ 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) ⁷ "or 'Who will descend into the deep?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" ¹⁶ But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" ¹⁷ Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

We are the Lord's building project, people that God brought together into his Church. And this building project is not done; he's always adding to it, always adding to us. Yep, we are talking about new people being added into the Church. We have been blessed this year so far to have welcomed 6 children and 1 adult into the Lord's building project through the holy waters of baptism. The Church continued to be built as 3 teens publicly professed their faith along with 10 more new adult members.

What did we do to build up the Lord's Church? Did we have the right programs that reached the right people at the right time with the right social media ads, that we have just that charismatic of a pastor who uses the exact right kind of persuasion and has all the right answers and that we have the right and best people here that you can't help but love. We want to say that the Lord's Church is built up, that people become right with God, because of our efforts. But is that how the Lord builds his Church?

For some, Christianity is like any other religion where there is a list of things that we have to do in order to get to some place better in the end. It's a system of climbing one rung of the ladder at a time that you would work piece by piece to get closer to God, that it's some kind of holy honey-do list. This is righteousness, becoming right with God, by the law.

Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them." (verse 5) What does that mean? Why is Paul bringing it up? He does so to show that if you want to become right with God by your own efforts and your own power, then you have to do everything written in the law. Your life must be lived and breathed as a completion of all God's laws. Many Jews held on to this idea, that their obedience to God's laws made them right with him. Yet, none of us can do this. None of us can live God's law in such a way that we are right with him because he does not accept half measures. He doesn't accept even a single mistake or a single failure. We don't completely live by God's law so we cannot become right with him in this way.

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). (verses 6-7) Who can be so awesome that they can go up to heaven by their power or their works? Who can work their way to heaven? Or who can raise Jesus Christ from the dead? The righteousness that is by faith says that no one can do this. No one can reach up and make themselves equal to God, no matter how many efforts or how much time. We cannot build ourselves up as the Lord's Church by our efforts.

But what does [the righteousness that is by faith] say in the positive? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: 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. 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. As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes 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." (verses 8-13)

We did not reach up and grab righteousness, nor can we. We can't bring it to us as if to bring Christ down, but righteousness came to you and me. The righteousness we have comes by faith in Jesus Christ. All my righteousness comes from the one who came down from heaven and lived perfect for me, from the one who was actually raised from the dead as a declaration that his life given into death truly paid for all my sins – every single one of them. I can't take any credit for it. I just believe that it is God's gift to me.

Christ did all the work to bring righteousness to you and me. If I claim any part, any piece of being right with God, that I did something to get this and make myself a part of God's Church, then I am saying that Christ is not enough, that something was lacking in what he did. I take some of his glory. I claim to grab the righteousness instead of the whole package being gifted to me in Christ.

So, if I can't take any credit for becoming right with God or making other people right with him, how do I and others get this righteousness, how is the Lord's Church built up with new people? Paul asked the same question: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?" (verses 14,15) We are here simply to get the message out, to gain a hearing, because "faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ." (verse 17)

So, how do we gain a hearing to share with people that God came down to us, brought righteousness to us, instead of some kind of god who holds righteousness out like a carrot on a stick – an unreachable goal that we are always trying to progress towards?

This I think is the hardest part: to gain a hearing for the message of who Christ is and what he has done for us, how he lived perfectly for us and sacrificed his life to take away all our sins – the Gospel. Yeah, we may worry about people rejecting us for sharing Jesus or about not having all the answers or even getting something wrong when we tell others about Jesus, but I more often rack my brain over how I just get someone to listen to me to tell them about Jesus. And COVID, of course, is not making this any easier, making it not so easy to just say, "Hey, come to my church and learn about Jesus."

When it comes to gaining a hearing to share Christ, the first thing to do is to pray for the opportunity. Pray that the Lord would put someone in your life that you can share him with them. This is what I've been doing more and more lately as for the first time in a long-time new people are not just showing up at church. Even if they could right now, no one's there. We had to shut down the building for two weeks so as to not spread COVID. So, I've been praying for the opportunities to share Christ with others, and the Lord has provided. My wife even commented the other day about how neat it is that we have a couple of opportunities to share Jesus with others, opportunities we hadn't had in a while. I told her that I had been praying for them. And she said with a smile on her face, "So, you're the one to blame." And, of course, it's not really me, but our God who answered those prayers and gave us those opportunities.

Yes, there are things that we have used that have brought people in the past - everything from door to door cold calls to postcards to social media ads, but what can we do now to gain a hearing to share Christ? This is something I find myself spending more time thinking about. As you have ideas, bring them to me, bring them to Harry Short, our Evangelism Chairman. And when you bring ideas, be willing to carry them out. If someone else has internet capabilities, we are still connecting as a church online. Maybe you can even have virtual get together. Call someone that you haven't made a purposeful connection with in a while. Continue to give of the treasures that God has entrusted to you to support missions – to this local congregation and to our national church body knowing that these gifts go to support more and new mission work. Yes, even now, COVID and all, there are still churches starting up. A virus is not going to stop God.

As we share Christ with others, that he is our righteousness come to us, that he has made us completely right with God without us adding anything, we know that some will not believe, even when they hear it. As Paul wrote, "Not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?'" (verse 16) Yet that response of unbelief was not the only one. Others did believe. Others will still believe. We don't have to bring Christ down or raise him from the dead. Righteousness by faith comes to people when his works, his perfect life lived for us, is shared. "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ." (verse 17) So, we pray for those opportunities to share Christ. We pray that the Lord help us to see those opportunities as he presents them. We pray that his message works to make more people right with him by what he has done. Amen.