

May 26 Lesson 13 (NIV)

Who Has Believed?

Devotional Reading: Deuteronomy 30:11–20

Background Scripture: Romans 10:1–21

Romans 10:1–17

¹ Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. ² For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. ³ Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. ⁴ Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

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.

Key Text

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.—Romans 10:9

Examining Our Faith

Unit III: Standing in the Faith

Lessons 10–13

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How to Say It

Gilgamesh *Gil-guh-mesh*.

Septuagint *Sep-too-ih-jent*.

Torah (*Hebrew*) *Tor-uh*.

Introduction

A. Life Is a Gigantic Prayer

Preaching that does not come out of love for the people being addressed ultimately does not benefit the listening crowd. The Catholic activist Dorothy Day once commented on preaching that, “If people will not listen, one can still love, one can still find Christ in them to love.” We need

not strain ourselves in order to provide examples of leaders whose message sounded good but whose practice turned out to be destructive. In these instances, whatever good was done because of the beautiful words is largely undone because of the harm of the speaker's actions. As with all Christian practice, preaching without love is worthless (see 1 Corinthians 13).

The same is true for prayer. We might think of preaching as a prayer shared with an audience. The speaker presents the good news in the hope and prayer that God will work in the hearts of those who hear. And, when we find ourselves unable to preach in words, our actions can still be a prayer that the people who interact with us will find themselves turning to God.

B. Lesson Context

Just how comprehensive *is* the good news of Jesus the Messiah? The entire book of Romans is concerned with this question. Romans 1–8 sets forth proof of the need and extent of God's mercy available to those who trust him with their lives. God has announced salvation for all who trust (see Romans 1:16–17). The gospel of grace has come to light for all. The extension of God's offer of salvation to Gentiles does not exclude Jews. Chapters 9–11 advance the discussion in part by considering the fate of Israel. The depth of God's love extends to Israel as well as the Gentiles (11:33–36).

Romans 10 reflects on Paul's hope that the good news that Jesus is the Messiah and Lord will also come to his fellow Jews. God promised salvation to Israel, and God keeps promises at all times. Therefore, the promise of salvation must come to Israel. The hard division between Jews and Christians did not occur until several generations after Paul's lifetime. Paul himself never used the word "Christians" in his writings, though it had begun to circulate within the church. He likely did not anticipate the centuries of hostility between the two groups or the habit of those thinking themselves to be Christians of insulting and even persecuting Jews. The hard division that Paul experienced and wrote about was between Jews (whether Christ-followers or not) and Gentiles (whether God-fearers or not). The gospel of reconciliation and peace in Christ reaches all, allowing God both to keep the ancient promises to Israel and to add the Gentiles to the faithful community.

I. Paul's Prayer (Romans 10:1–4)

A. Heart's Desire (v. 1)

1. Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.

Praying for God's salvation *for the Israelites* was probably habitual for Paul. His concern for his people—including family and friends—was reason enough to pray for the nation. The Scriptures he long had studied modeled praying for deliverance for Israel from its various foes (examples: Psalms 79; 85:4–7; 130:7–8). And there was an expectation, found particularly in the prophets' writings, that the nation would be restored after suffering for their sins (Isaiah 40:1–2; 49:14–26; Jeremiah 30:10–11; Ezekiel 40–48; etc.). Paul's prayers expanded to include that his people would turn to Christ and find eternal salvation in him.

B. Zeal Without Knowledge (vv. 2–3)

2. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

This verse and the next summarize Paul's understanding of the state of his Jewish contemporaries. Paul did not suggest that his fellow Jews were all pursuing evil ends, because that was clearly not true. Jews who did not follow Jesus still desired to follow God. But, Paul asserts, they misunderstood the trajectory of God's work and how their own Scriptures pointed to Jesus as their Messiah (compare Luke 24:25–32). Paul does not dismiss *zeal* for God as insignificant; he knew from personal experience that misdirected zeal could be turned to God's purposes (Acts 22:3–21; Galatians 1:13–14; Philippians 3:6). Still, his people's zeal without *knowledge* of Christ prevented them from recognizing that God's long-anticipated provision for deliverance of his people (and indeed all nations) had finally been revealed (compare Acts 2:17–36).

3. Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Paul has argued that *the righteousness of God* consists of extending salvation to all on the basis of trust in the work of Christ (Romans 4; see lesson 11). This verse echoes Romans 2:17–24, in which Paul criticized the attempt to make Jews out of Gentiles. Attempts to come to God on the basis of anything other than Christ, and especially on the basis of any human achievement, fail (compare Philippians 3:9). An approach to saving the Gentiles that tried to compel them to keep the Law of Moses (the Torah) neglected the deeper reality that the relationship to God always depends on faithful trust, not on the works themselves.

C. Christ and the Law (v. 4)

4. Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

The word translated *culmination* has the sense of “the ultimate goal” in Greek (compare Romans 6:22; 1 Timothy 1:5; 1 Peter 1:9). The coming of the *Christ* (the Hebrew Messiah) and his activity in revealing God's salvation to all human beings was always the goal *of the law*. And the Law of Moses itself pointed Israel to the work of God, as opposed to the law's existing for its own sake. Paul did not expect the abolition of Torah but the completion of God's promises (compare Matthew 5:17–20). Those who trust God's work through Jesus have fulfilled the Torah's overarching objectives.

II. The Word of Salvation (Romans 10:5–13)

A. Righteousness by Faith (vv. 5–8)

5. Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: “The person who does these things will live by them.”

Here and in Galatians 3:12, Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5: *The person who does these things will live by them*. Paul did not oppose Jews keeping *the law*, and he accepted the idea that its instructions can guide a person to a wiser, more faithful life (see Romans 2:25; compare Psalm 119; James 1:22; 2:10–13). In this way, Jews who kept the Torah in faith did *live by them* and could experience the limited *righteousness* of striving to accomplish God’s will.

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 up from the dead).

Paul next quotes Deuteronomy 30:12–13: *Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?... Who will descend into the deep?’*, These verses are part of God’s promise that he would extend mercy to Israel after the nation experienced the consequences of breaking covenant and turned to him in repentance and faith (see commentary on Romans 10:8, below).

Paul adds to these quotations two comments, the first being *that is, to bring Christ down*. This is characteristic of a typical Jewish style of reading. In this style, the reader-scholar supplemented the original text by connecting it to a larger doctrinal point. Here, Paul’s point is that Christ’s descent into the human world (Philippians 2:7–8) was God’s work, not that of striving human beings. Salvation, therefore, comes from God and not from humans. The second comment, *to bring Christ up from the dead*, connects the ancient text to the core Christian story of Jesus’ resurrection (Mark 16:6–7; etc.).

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:

The quotation continues, this time from Deuteronomy 30:13. In Deuteronomy *the word* (in context, the Law of Moses) is nearby, entering into the heart of those who love God with all their “heart, ... soul, ... and ... strength” (6:5). The Lord asserted his laws are neither hard to understand nor difficult to carry out (30:14), though people’s experience showed that perfect adherence was not possible (example: Acts 15:10). This puts keeping the law into stark contrast with the heroics of mythic people like Gilgamesh, who needed to climb to Heaven or cross the ocean depths to please their supposed gods. Unlike mythical ancient heroes, ordinary people could not go to Heaven or survive in the waters, but they didn’t need to in order to keep the Torah. It was accessible—as long as it was written on their hearts and not just in a book (consider 4:29; compare Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 11:19).

The message concerning faith that comes to believers, both Jews and Gentiles, is the trustworthy message that Paul has been preaching. The end of the verse sets up the next several sentences.

B. Trust in God (vv. 9–10)

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.

Paul links the confession of faith from one’s *mouth* with the belief in one’s *heart* and thus to the commitments of the whole person (compare Deuteronomy 6:5; see commentary on Romans

10:8, above). To confess *Jesus is Lord* is a radical commitment. It was obviously so in the first century AD when the Roman emperors claimed to be sons of their gods, and many gods were worshipped as sovereign. The confession “Jesus is Lord” was almost certainly a part of early Christian worship; it was definitely a statement used to indicate one’s ultimate allegiance (see 1 Corinthians 12:3; Philippians 2:11). Anyone who can sincerely make that confession with their mouth and heart will see a changed life over time.

To *believe* that God has raised Jesus *from the dead* also means to trust that God has overcome the power of death itself (see Revelation 1:18). Salvation involves both the present and the future. We can understand being *saved* as a shorthand for the entire relationship that the redeemed person enjoys with God. The effects begin in our Spirit-led lives now and will culminate in everlasting life in Heaven.

This verse is sometimes interpreted as a description of the entry point into the Christian life. Yet Paul’s vision goes beyond beginnings. Confession of Christ’s lordship occurs daily, both in the face of opposition or hardship and in more peaceful times. It also involves witnesses (1 Timothy 6:12), making it a public commitment (Acts 19:18). The message of the gospel connects deeply to real lives, and those who hear it must internalize it and proclaim it.

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.

The prior verse followed the sequence confess/believe in the order of Deuteronomy 30. But this verse follows a more intuitive order, with the commitments of the *heart* leading to the words of the *mouth*. (On the heart, see lesson 12 commentary on Romans 5:5.) When the heart and the mouth align in acknowledging the saving work of Christ, it becomes possible to experience both righteousness and salvation. Paul does not separate the realities of righteousness and salvation any more than he separates trust and confession (see 10:9, above). These all interconnect, each supporting the other.

C. Faith Includes All (vv. 11–13)

11. As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.”

Paul quotes Isaiah 28:16 (also in Romans 9:33), which is part of a promise that God would rebuild Zion after its destruction. The quotation may not quite match how our English Bibles state Isaiah 28:16 because Paul is quoting from the ancient Greek version known as the Septuagint. Paul may have read that text metaphorically so that the promised “stone” laid in Zion became a reference to the Messiah (compare Acts 4:11), although Paul does not spell out this connection.

The Bible often conceives of shame as a social condition, visible to all, rather than an inner, more private emotion (examples: Psalms 35:26; 132:18; Isaiah 42:17). Paul understands trust in God as the opposite of public humiliation. At the final judgment, those who trust in Jesus for deliverance from sins *will never be put to shame* because our hope of salvation will be fully realized.

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,

This verse returns to the thesis statement of the book in Romans 1:16–17. The theme of God’s richness also appears in 2 Corinthians 8:9, which describes the work of Christ in terms of the foregoing of wealth. The image in both texts is of a king who bestows goods on subjects whenever they need them. By calling Jesus *Lord of all*, the verse emphasizes his close relationship to the Father and the universal scope of his kingdom.

13. for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

This verse quotes Joel 2:32 (see also Acts 2:16–21), which is part of a passage about one instance of God’s rescuing Israel. Both Joel and Paul understand God as one who answers the sincere cries of people longing for help. Because Jesus is “Lord of all” (Romans 10:12), *everyone* may call on him.

III. Preaching Leads to Faith (Romans 10:14–17)

A. How Will They Hear? (vv. 14–15)

14–15a. 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?

How do people know to *call on* God? The answer becomes a sustained explanation of the nature and purpose of Christian preaching. The act of proclaiming the gospel ultimately comes from the God who sends out proclaimers, not from their own concerns or abilities. Paul always understood his own mission as following God’s leading (examples: Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:1). Here, we see a logical progression: a preacher must be sent so that an audience can hear the gospel and come to faith.

15b. As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

The evidence Paul offers for God’s calling messengers to preach is a quotation of Isaiah 52:7. That text, in turn, is part of a long discussion of the *good news* to ancient Israel: God was ending the suffering of the Babylonian exile. The exiled people would soon return home and rebuild the ruined cities, especially Jerusalem (examples: Ezra 6:13–18; Nehemiah 6:15). The people would experience a good life in their own land, complete with the healing of physical and social ills (see Isaiah 61:1–4).

An important characteristic of Christian preaching is the proclamation of peace between God and humanity. When one experiences reconciliation with the Lord, it becomes possible to be reconciled to other people as well. Christian teaching and preaching should, therefore, be filled with joy and hope because of the good things God wants to accomplish in us and through us.

B. Who Has Believed? (vv. 16–17)

16. But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?”

Paul quotes Isaiah 53:1, a text that is part of the prophetic reflection on the fact that people do not always listen to God’s Word (compare Isaiah 6:9–11; compare John 12:37–41). In its

immediate context, Isaiah 53:1 continues the account of the Suffering Servant, noting the disbelief of many.

In spite of that disbelief, Paul's job, and the job of all Christ-followers, is to keep celebrating the good news and to live lives that reflect our faith in Jesus (2 Corinthians 4). After all, we might plant the seed and water it, but God makes it grow (1 Corinthians 3:6). Our responsibility is not the outcome but our faithfulness to report *the good news*.

17. Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

There is a contrast between verses 16 and 17. Both draw on an idea from the Old Testament prophets regarding how their audience would react. Verse 16 emphasizes the negative side of unbelief, while verse 17 understands the power of *the message* to be so great that it leads people to trust *Christ*. Paul was confident that both Jews and Gentiles would learn to trust God once they understood the nature of the gospel.

Conclusion

A. Who May be Saved?

The offer of salvation comes through the preaching of the Word as one of hope and expectation. God is *for* us and wishes to be *with* us. When we trust the reliability of that offer, we can enter into a life of joyful hope, which the Bible calls salvation. That life begins now and extends into eternity.

In Romans 10, Paul speaks of those who cry out to God, confess Jesus as Lord, and so receive salvation. Like the prophets of Israel, who called on their people to turn from evil toward good, Paul makes a direct connection between the words that humans speak and God's willingness to save. The words must be sincerely uttered, but the key actor in the drama of salvation is God. Preaching connects closely to prayer as we seek to conform our desires to God's desires. It must be full of hope, inviting listeners to trust a gracious God.

This readiness to hear comes from God's passionate love for the creation. In truth, God created the world originally out of love, and he sustains the creation out of the same love. In an environment of love, a needy humanity crying out for help receives a willing ear.

B. Prayer

O God who makes promises and keeps them over generations and long centuries, our prayer is for all people near and far to come to know Jesus. Send us! In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Confess and believe that Jesus is Lord!¹
