

## Romans 9:30 – 10:21 - Christ is the End of the Law

One of the things which always annoys me about coverage of the Olympics and Paralympics, or indeed any sporting event, is the number of times athletes or commentators use the amazing success that they see in front of them to suggest that with the right attitude and determination anyone could achieve the same thing. Follow your dreams! You can do it! Be what you want to be! You hear it too in education circles and on TV talent shows. Anyone can succeed in anything they like with the right attitude and plenty of passion! But of course that simply isn't true. No matter how hard I try I am never going to win an Olympic medal, be on stage for a sell-out gig at Wembley Stadium or even play for Luton town. Effort alone, no matter how great an effort, will never get me to that point.

And when it comes to matters of faith people sometimes make the same mistake. "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe with all your heart!" But of course that isn't true either is it? It does matter what you believe and what God you believe in. A deep, passionate and committed faith in the tooth fairy is not going to bring you any financial security let alone any spiritual security. There is only one God, one faith and one Lord worth trusting with our eternal souls, and only one means by which we can find salvation and eternal life. Anything else is just hot air and wishful thinking, and however firmly we believe it will leave us lost both in this life and for all eternity.

In contrast it is Paul's absolute confidence in the gospel of Jesus Christ and salvation by grace alone through faith alone in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ alone which dominates our passage today. And he's going to remind us of 3 things: that salvation is by faith and not by works; the importance of the proclamation of the gospel; and the amazing patience and mercy of God.

All of this comes on the back of Romans chapters 9 which we looked at together last week. Chapter 9 was a long and complicated chapter, and it may have taken you all week to try and digest what we went through. But the main thrust was about God's sovereign choice in salvation; how we are totally lost in our sin, firmly fixed in our minds and our attitudes against God and both unwilling and unable to come to God ourselves unless he draws us. And yet although we all deserve his wrath God in his mercy does save many. But whilst Paul rejoices at the fact that the Gentiles, people like us, are brought into God's kingdom his heart is broken at the hardness of heart shown by so many of his fellow Jews.

And that's where our passage kicks off today in the end of chapter 9. You see Paul is fulsome in his praise of the Jews in their zeal for God and for living a righteous life, but despite their enthusiasm and passion and commitment they do not achieve their goal. Why not? He gives the answer in verse 32. "*Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works.*" So this is our 1<sup>st</sup> point:

### **1: Salvation is by faith and not by works.**

Like spiritual Olympic athletes the Jews had been pursuing God by their own efforts. They had trained hard, put their beliefs into practice, dressed properly, lived properly, prayed regularly, given sacrificially, and even created a whole society where the laws of God were protected by a whole range of other laws so that no one ever came close to breaking the Commandments of the Lord. And yet, despite their efforts and energies, they had failed. Why? Paul says that it was because their zeal was not based on knowledge and that since they didn't know the righteousness of God they sought to establish their own. As he puts it in verse 23 of chapter 9: they had stumbled over the stumbling stone that salvation is by faith and not by works.

It's interesting that Paul doesn't take them to the teachings of Jesus to show them that they are in the wrong; he takes them back to Moses in the Old Testament law. And Paul's point through verses 5 to 13 is that the law of God given by Moses, and even the sacrifices in the Temple, were there to show them that salvation was, and had always been, by faith and not by works. Let me give you two examples of how Paul's argument works.

In verse 5 Paul quotes Moses who, in speaking about the law of God says "*the person who does these things will live by them.*" On the surface this seems to mean that Moses was teaching the possibility of getting salvation- 'life' - through law keeping. Now of course on one level that is true. If we could live absolutely perfectly we would earn our salvation. But we can't! Since Adam fell in the Garden of Eden no one except Jesus Christ has ever lived the perfect life. And actually the laws given by Moses showed that! If it had been possible for the Jews to live perfectly and so obtain salvation by themselves then why were they required to make sacrifices for their sin at least once a year? And why were there restrictions about who could approach God in the holy of holies if people could be holy? The law set out the righteous requirements of God and then said very clearly you cannot achieve this! You need God's forgiveness! And of course coming to God in repentance always required faith! Even in the Old Testament God's people were saved by faith and not by works. They should have known that because the Law of Moses made that clear.

But Paul goes on in verses 6 and 7 and quotes from Deuteronomy 30. At the end of this chapter where Moses sets out the blessings and curses that come from obedience or disobedience of God's commands, Moses tells the people that "*the Lord your God will circumcise your hearts so that you may love him with all your heart and soul and live.*" Physical circumcision was part of God's covenant relationship with his people, a way of reminding them of his covenant, but that wasn't enough. That was an outward sign but what they most needed was God to circumcise their hearts and bring them to new birth and a real and living faith.

As we've seen, the Law of Moses was absolutely clear that whilst obedience was demanded by God it could never save. For the Jews, as for us, obedience to God's commandments, living a holy life, is always seen as a heartfelt response to God's gracious and generous goodness and mercy to us, not as a way to earn that mercy.

That's why Paul, again quoting Moses, can go on to say that we can't ever hope to ascend to heaven by our own efforts (verse 6) or descend into hell to pay for our sins ourselves (verse 7). Neither is possible. We just cannot save ourselves by our own effort.

Instead salvation is by faith alone; faith alone in the one who has already accomplished everything for us. By faith we believe that Jesus descended from heaven to earth so that we might go to be with him for ever. By faith we believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and descended into hell so that our sin and guilt might be fully atoned for. If we try and obtain God's eternal favour by our own efforts, by living a good enough life, we will fail. If the Jews, who had the laws of God given to them through Moses, and who lived in a country where the worship of God was integrated into everyday life, could not live up to God's standard, which they couldn't, then we need to realise that we cannot either.

Now I don't know how that makes you feel. If you are not yet a Christian it may make you rather uneasy. The chances are that if you are here in church today that you are not anti- God, but I hope you can see that that is nowhere near enough. The Jews were fervent and passionate in their righteousness but it wasn't enough. Coming to church, living a moral life, even being a respected member of society does not and

cannot earn your forgiveness. We are saved by faith in a crucified and risen saviour as we come in repentance, placing our trust in Jesus' finished work on the cross.

Accepting our need of God's forgiveness and that it comes to us only as a gift by grace alone is incredibly humbling, especially if we have been a go-getter in life, successful, wealthy and respected. But if you think your own performance merits God's love and forgiveness you will never come in humble confession. Like the Jews you will create your own standard of righteousness and try to find eternal life by living by it but you will fail. Friends, we are not saved by our works, but by grace.

And the level of confidence we can have in God's forgiveness is summed up by Paul in verse 4: "*Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*"

What does that mean? It means that by living a perfect life Jesus lived up to all that the law required. It means that by dying on the cross he satisfied the righteous requirements of God that sin must be punished. And it means that by rising to new life those who by faith alone trust in Christ are now dressed in his robes of righteousness. Friends, if we are trusting in Jesus and his finished work, our eternal destiny is secure, and those trusting in Jesus we will never be put to shame.

Point number 1, salvation is by grace alone and not by works. Here's the 2<sup>nd</sup> point:

## **2: The importance of the proclamation of the gospel**

There are some times in life when good news needs to be kept quiet. Perhaps you get told of an award which you can't speak about until it is made public. Perhaps you become pregnant and don't want to say anything until after the first 3 months. Perhaps you find somewhere to go on holiday, a place so perfect and unspoiled that you want to keep it to yourself.

But the good news of Jesus isn't like that. The good news of Jesus is like finding a well of sparkling fresh water in a desert when everyone around you is dying of thirst. The good news of Jesus is like uncovering buried treasure in the ground enough to lift your whole community out of poverty. The good news of Jesus is like waking in the night to discover a fire that will consume all those around you unless you raise the alarm and lead them to safety. In those situations where the need is so dire and the reward so great surely we would not keep silent. That's why in verses 9 and 10 Paul links together personal faith, believing in your heart, with witnessing, declaring with your mouth that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And the importance of that is stressed in verses 14 to 15. "*How 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?*" Believing comes from hearing the word about Jesus; hearing the word comes from someone preaching; and for someone to preach they need to be sent. And for those who hear and believe the feet of those who bring that good news to them are truly beautiful!

Last week we heard that it is God's sovereign choice that determines who is saved, but in this chapter the means which God uses to bring people to himself is laid bare. And the normal means of people coming to faith is the passing on of the message of Jesus.

Now like me you may have read stories of dramatic conversions where the Lord appears to people in visions or dreams. But whilst the Lord can and does use any means he wishes, the normal, ordinary means by which people become Christians is through the proclamation of the gospel.

So think how you became a Christian. I'm confident it was through someone sharing the good news about Jesus with you. Perhaps someone in your family or a friend talked to you at work or in the pub and then invited you to come along to church and you went. At some point the message preached to you, perhaps on one Sunday or over many months, just seemed to make sense so there came a point when you sensed your own sin and guilt and need of a saviour, when your heart was turned to look at the cross and the perfect son of God crucified in your place; and whether physically or spiritually, there was a moment when you were brought to your knees and you came in repentance and faith to ask for God's forgiveness and the new birth and eternal hope he freely gives to all who come. That process began when someone told you about Jesus.

You see God's method for the salvation of the world is simple: it is the proclamation of the gospel. That's what we do here every Sunday as we gather around God's word; it's what happens when people like Billy Graham or Glen Scrivenor come along and lead big events where hundreds get to hear about Jesus at the same time; and it's what happens as you and I pass on the good news of Jesus to our friends and family and neighbours and colleagues and to the strangers that the Lord brings across our path.

And all Christians have a part to play in this. Part of being a Christian is declaring with our lips that Jesus Christ is Lord. Is it hard? Yes, it is sometimes hard. Do we open ourselves up to ridicule and abuse when we talk about Jesus? Yes we do. That's just the way it has always been and the way it is. Could we do it better? Of course we could. But there are always books on the book stall and courses being run that will help us be more effective in given a reason for the hope we have. But the fact that we are not as polished as we might be is not an excuse for not trying. Neither is the fact that many may turn away and not want to hear what we have to say an excuse for not trying. The primary means God uses for the salvation of lost souls is the proclamation of the gospel and in the power of God's Holy Spirit you and I are sent to tell them of the one who loves them and who gave himself for them. And I don't care how many times you go for a pedicure; your feet will never be as beautiful as they are when they carry you to give good news to a lost soul.

Salvation is by faith alone and not by works: The importance of the proclamation of the gospel. And here is the 3<sup>rd</sup> point:

### **3: The amazing patience and mercy of God.**

If you remember I said last week that chapters 9, 10 and 11 are primarily an explanation of why so many of the Jews have not believed in Jesus. Paul has already said that the main reason is that Israel had pursued God on their own terms, seeking to earn their way to heaven by works, and not by faith, but in the last part of chapter 10 Paul wants to make it absolutely clear that God has given Israel every opportunity to hear the good news. Of course we've seen that already, but Paul wants there to be no shadow of a doubt in anyone's mind.

So from verse 16 onwards he is absolutely clear that not only had God sent them prophet after prophet after prophet to proclaim the good news for them, but even when they did not respond he did not give up. Such was the enduring patience and love of God that he kept sending more and more prophets, even using the Gentiles to stir up the Jews to jealousy that they might respond to his gracious call.

We will see more about the patience of God next week as we get a glimpse of God's eternal plan for his Old Testament people, but I want you to notice that God does not give up. In verse 21 the Lord says that he '*held out his hands all day long to a disobedient and obstinate people.*' All day long! You see, the Lord

has not turned his back on the Jews. His message of full and free forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Jesus is just as relevant and available for the people of Jewish heritage today as it is for those of Gentile heritage, and that's the rest of us. By the way, it's also just as vital for the Muslim and the Buddhist and Hindu and the Sikh and the Mormon and the Jehovah's Witnesses and atheists who don't care and the agnostics who are unsure and the religious people who mistakenly think that they can earn God's blessings.

And with the Lord it isn't just one chance and that's it; one missed opportunity and you're lost. Through the beauty of creation, through the proclamation of the word, through the witness of churches and individual Christians in every community on the planet, the Lord holds out his hands to an obstinate and disobedient people and says come to me all who are weary and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Come to me all who carry the burden of sin and failure and I will wash you clean. Come to me all those who have no hope for the future and I will give you a hope and a promise. Come to me all who recognise their sinfulness and failure, who know they can never attain to the righteousness of God, and let me forgive you, adopt you, bless you and dress you in the robes of righteousness of Jesus.

Isn't it astonishing that the Lord doesn't give up on those who turn away but continues to pursue people from the Jewish background who have the law, who have the prophets, but who pursue righteousness by their own means and reject Jesus? I think so! Such is the amazing patience of God.

But it is also astonishing that the Lord reaches out and saves those who give him no second thought. Some of you here would testify to that. Many of us were brought up in Christian homes but there are number amongst us who grew up rejecting everything about God, wanting nothing to do with him and perhaps even doubting his very existence, and yet today they would testify to God's saving grace and wonderful mercy that reached out and rescued them.

So let me close with this. There are some things in life you and I will never do because we are simply not up to the task. One of those things is earning eternal life through a life of righteousness - so let's give up trying to impress God. Jesus Christ is the end of the Law. By his life and death he has satisfied its demands and opened for us the gates of glory. Salvation is not by works but by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

But whilst that is humbling the good news is that God's salvation is available to everyone, *'for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'* So if you are not a Christian, whatever your background, whatever your history, whatever your mistakes and failings, a place in God's kingdom is available for you through faith in Jesus Christ. And because God is patient and merciful, however many times you have rejected him in the past, still today he stands with his arms open, inviting you to come to him.

And if you have already accepted God's forgiveness, then you have a job to do. God has led to you the water of life, how can you keep it to yourself when others are dying of thirst? God has fed you with the bread of Heaven, how can you not want to feed the starving crowds around you? God has blessed you with untold riches in Christ that are enough to share, how can you be selfish and not speak up? Salvation is by faith alone. God's grace and mercy mean that salvation is available today to all who call on his name. Let's make sure our feet are beautiful in passing on the good news. Amen.