Romans 10:1-21 Sermon Manuscript

“Why Israel Failed to Believe”

Imagine in the Vietnam War there was a platoon of American soldiers who are captured by the Viet Cong soldiers and are prisoners of war in a prison camp. That platoon one day receives a game of Monopoly to play. But they end up using the fake money as currency among the prison camp to buy cigars and other goods among each other. A number of years pass by with these prisoners using the Monopoly as currency to trade and buy and then the war is over. The American soldiers are set free and return back to America. One of the platoon soldiers during those years amassed 200,000 dollars of Monopoly money. He goes to a Wells Fargo bank and goes to a bank teller. The bank teller asks him “What can I do for you?” The soldier responds, “I would like to deposit 200,000 dollars into my bank.” The bank teller looks at the money, thinking to himself “how this poor man must be suffering from the PTSD of war!” Then looking at the soldier he says, “I’m sorry sir, but this is not real money. This money is from the Monopoly game. I cannot accept it.”

Well when it comes to the state of the Jewish people, the nation of Israel, they are like that disillusioned soldier. They amassed tons of righteousness to try to deposit to gain salvation from God, but it was not the right kind of righteousness. It was a fake, counterfeit type of righteousness that the Jews were relying on. Just as only the green bills issued by the United States Government are considered valid, so only the righteousness that is granted by God and from God is the only real, valid, currency that one can use and receive. And in this passage we are going to see why Israel failed to believe. We are going to see why Israel is the way it is in their state of unbelief. But before that, it’s important to zoom out a little and review what has been going on so far in the book of Romans. If you remember a long time ago I mentioned how the letter to the Romans was written to unite Jewish and Gentile believers in the churches of Rome. Why? Because several years prior to the book of Romans, the Roman emperor Claudius issued an edict banishing all Jews from Rome. The Jews were creating a ruckus over who Jesus Christ was with the Christians. But instead of trying to deal with this theological squabble, Rome decided to just separate the two and he banished the Jews from Rome. So now, after this edict, the Jewish believers who were in the churches of Rome are gone and only the Gentile believers are left.

You can imagine several years go by without the Jews, and those churches that once had Jewish believers are now predominantly Gentile in nature and thinking and culture. But then, the Jews were allowed back in Rome after a time and so they come back to where they were going to church and to their horror and disgust, they come to a potluck where a pig and all sorts of what they would consider unclean animals were being cooked and eaten. So now there is both theological and cultural tension between the Jewish and Gentile believers in the church of Rome. There is disunity and factions and arguments over customs and what foods to eat, etc. etc. So how is this disunity solved? The Gospel. That’s where God inspired the apostle Paul to write the letter to the Romans to unify them by the gospel. Paul writes in chapter 1 that it is the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and then the Greek, or the Gentile. For in the gospel, we see the righteousness of God where God’s righteousness can be credited to those who are unrighteous, who are us. The problem is however, many reject this righteousness from God and they actually suppress this truth in their unrighteousness. And so Paul goes on to explain how God responds to that in judgment by letting them go from his gracious hand and allowing their unrighteousness to take it’s full wicked course. If you really want to suppress my truth, go right ahead. And so we see that the Gentiles who insist on suppressing the truth are judged already in their depravity.

However, Paul doesn’t let the Jews off the hook either, for he points out that actually they are equally guilty in falling short of the glory of God as the Gentiles are. Maybe they didn’t sin quite as wickedly or terribly as the Gentiles, but they have sinned nonetheless. And so at the end of Romans 3, Paul declares that all, both Jew and Gentile, have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But God has provided a remedy for sin, He has provided His Son Jesus who has received the wrath of God in our place so that we would be set free from sin and become a child of the king. And to receive this gift of salvation and forgiveness of sins, all one needs to do is to receive it by faith, by trusting completely the work of Jesus Christ for sin. And when you trust in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation, you are justified, or are declared righteous in God’s sight. God takes your unrighteousness, credits it to Jesus’ account, and takes Jesus’ righteousness and credits it to your account. And Paul goes on to demonstrate that in chapter 4, faith alone was always the mode or way in which Old Testament saints before Jesus were saved. Then in chapter 5 Paul explains what happens when we receive and trust in Jesus…that an otherworldly peace comes and the love of God floods our hearts because God has poured His love into our hearts through His Holy Spirit. And this love and this peace can sustain us and give us assurance that we are one of His own even through the suffering we face in this life.

Then from chapter 6 onward, Paul switches gears to how a justified person, how a person that is made right before God is to live and reflect that righteous standing before God, which is the process of sanctification. We are no longer slaves to sin but we have died to sin and died to the Law. However, there is a problem…the practical reality of our sanctification is not what it should be. We still sin and will struggle in this life because though our old man has been crucified with Christ, we still carry his dead body on our backs. And when you carry a corpse around with you, you are not going to be as healthy as you can be when it comes to carrying out the will of God. But then there is Romans chapter 8 which provides the victory over sin through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit actually enables us to carry out the heart of the Law, even more than what Old Testament believers were able to do. Because they did not have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit while we do. But then the question becomes, what about Israel? Has God abandoned His own people and have transferred all the blessings promised in the Old Testament to the Gentiles? The answer in chapter 9 is “No, God has not abandoned His people Israel.” But then “why do not they believe?” And so in chapter 9, Paul gave us the divine sovereignty perspective on salvation on what is going on when someone does not believe. He says, not all Israel believes because not all are chosen or predestined for salvation.

And then we come to chapter 10 of Romans where Paul is actually going to focus more on the human responsibility side of salvation instead of the divine sovereignty perspective of salvation. From a human responsibility side of salvation, those who do not believe are fully responsible for their unbelief because they refuse to believe in God’s righteousness. And chapter 10 is an explanation of that. Chapter 10:1-2 “*Brothers, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation, for I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge*.” Even though Paul has just talked about the fact that God chooses whom He desires to save, even though salvation is dependent on God’s choice and not ours, yet it doesn’t mean it is pointless to pray for people’s salvation. God not only ordains the end but also the means to that end. And God has ordained people’s salvation in conjunction with our prayers to achieve that end. So we have a responsibility to pray as believers because we don’t know who the elect are until the end comes. And Paul as a zealous Jew himself testifies that his fellow Jews have a zeal for God, but not according to the knowledge required to save them. Paul was passionate and zealous for God! Galatians 1 says that he persecuted the church of God without measure! Mormons, Catholics, Muslims can all be zealous for God, but just because you have zeal does not mean God is necessarily pleased with you. You have to have zeal for God from the right heart and mindset.

So what does zeal without knowledge look like? It looks like this, verse 3 “*For not knowing about the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God*.” You see the Jews were zealous in their own righteousness, and not God’s righteousness… they were trying to establish their own salvation essentially. They refused to submit to the righteousness of God which comes only from God to a sinner and only through faith. If you believe by faith in Christ, then verse 4, Christ becomes the “end” or the fulfillment of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Christ does not abolish the Law but He fulfills it. The difference that we are talking about here is from what source are you trying to achieve righteousness. Is it through the Law or through Christ?

If it is of the Law, which is what the Jews have been trying to do then this is what happens…Verse 5 “*For Moses write about the righteousness which of the law: “The man who does these things shall live by them.”* We have already went previously in Romans about how the Law does not have the power to save. If you live as if the Law has the power to save you, then you will only end up being condemned by the Law, because it is an unattainable standard. The Law was never meant to save. It’s not like God designed the Mosaic Law as a standard by which if someone kept it perfectly, he would be hypothetically saved. No, God designed the Law to reveal how sinful sin is and to reveal sinners that they condemned so that they would not place their hope in their external obedience to the Law, but in the obedience of Christ on their behalf. And verse 5 says that if you try to go the route of righteousness through the Law, then you are bound and obligated to live by them perfectly. Paul says it more clearly in Galatians 5:3 “*every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law*.*”* The Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 was a council in which key leaders of the church and Israel met together to determine whether it was necessary to keep the Mosaic Law. The Pharisees believed it was necessary. But the apostle Peter, who was a Jew, responded to that by saying this in Acts 15:10 “*Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?*”

But the righteousness that comes from faith is not an unbearable yoke like the Mosaic Law was. Verses 6 through 8 says, “*But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will go up into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down), or ‘Who will go down into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” – that is, the word of faith which we are preaching…”* In other words, the salvation that comes by receiving the righteousness of Christ through faith is not somewhere far away that you have to strive to achieve. It’s not up in heaven or down in the very deepest part of the ocean like Challenger’s deep in the Mariana Trench, no it's been revealed to you by God Himself. And what has been revealed? The way of salvation. Verses 9 and 10, “*that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved* *for with* *the heart a person believes, leading to righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, leading to salvation*.” Now I think many of us are familiar with Romans 10:9 and we use it in evangelism a lot. And unfortunately many use this as a formulaic confession that as long as you acknowledge these things, you will be saved.

But it’s deeper than that. To confess Jesus as Lord means not only acknowledging that Jesus is God, the Lord, the only true God, but it is to submit to His Lordship. If someone is Lord over your life, what does that mean? It means He is Lord over every aspect of your life including your thoughts, intentions, and desires and affections. It means you are a slave obeying your Lord, to do whatever He commands you to do. And this aspect of lordship in salvation is so missing in today’s church. Christianity has been reduced to an “easy believism” type of faith where as long as you acknowledge the facts about Jesus’ lordship and deity, you will be saved. But to say that Jesus is your Lord means to enter into a life long discipleship process where you are constantly learning and submitting to your lord and master Jesus Christ.

Turning to Jesus, repenting from sin means you obey Jesus to leave your life of sin decisively and then to continue on in obedience to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. It’s not that you have to obey in the sense of conquer x,y, z sin in your life and then you can get salvation…no, no, no that’s a works based salvation, but rather confessing Jesus as Lord means you *BEGIN* a life long process of obedience to Him. And that’s what the author of Hebrews gets at when he says that faith is essentially synonymous with obedience in Hebrews 5:9 that Christ became the source of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him. Even earlier back in Romans 2:6-8 obedience is tied to faith. The word of God says that God “*will repay to each according to his works: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and anger*.”

And to get to that confession in the first place, you must believe in your heart, with all your being, not just mustering up the strength to believe, but that truly it is conviction from your heart that God did indeed raise Jesus from the dead defeating sin and death and vindicating the fact that Jesus was truly the Son of God. And if you believe in your heart that reality, it’s going to lead you on the road to righteousness where when you call on Jesus to save you and confess Him as Lord, you will be led to salvation as verse 10 says. Have you done that? Have you truly confessed Jesus as Lord of your life, not just knowing who He is, but actually believing it, trusting it and banking your entire life on it? Because verse 11 says “*For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes upon Him will not be put to shame. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him*, for “*Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*.” Are you embarrassed to call Jesus your Lord and your God? Well the Bible says, if you believe in Jesus, no one and nothing can put you to shame for believing in the name of the only begotten Son of God. In John chapter 12 Mary knelt down and broke a year’s worth of pure nard at Jesus’ feet to anoint His feet and clean it with her hair, Judas Iscariot took shame at that and said, “why is this woman wasting this very costly perfume on Jesus?” It could be sold and given to the poor. Judas was shameful of Jesus because he didn’t see the infinite value and worth of worshipping Jesus. He was there only for the money and how to get rich off of Jesus. But Mary was not ashamed of Jesus, because she truly believed in Him and saw Him for who He was.

Now the question that needs to be answered is “Has God properly provided the means by which the Jews could call on Jesus for salvation? Here’s the answer, “yes he has.” Starting in verse 14 “*How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? And how will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who proclaim good news of good things*!” The point of these verses is not primarily meant to be a motivator for missions and evangelism (although that is an appropriate application that we can get from it). The point is for God to show that He has provided each of the means necessary to lead to the desired end goal of salvation for a sinner. He sent the preacher to proclaim the good news, the Jews heard it, and some Jews have called on the Lord for salvation as a result of it. Again, just because God is sovereign and ultimately responsible for the salvation of a sinner does not mean evangelism is pointless. Evangelism, like prayer is one of those ordained means to achieve the ordained end.

But the sad truth is not all who heard the good news heeded or obeyed the good news and Isaiah is quoted to support that. Verse 16 “*However, they (the Jews) did not all heed the good news, for Isaiah says, “Lord who has believed our report*?” The good news was not just a New Testament concept, it was there in the Old Testament, yes not quite fully revealed in its details like the New Testament reveals it, but nonetheless the good news of salvation from sin was preached like in Isaiah 53, which is quoted here. And who does Isaiah 53 talk about? The suffering servant, the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Therefore, verse 17, “*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ*.” Christ has always been there in the Old Testament in types and shadows and back in Genesis when Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him righteousness, Abraham’s faith came from hearing the word of Christ because God the Father’s words are also God the Son’s words because Jesus is Yahweh.

Verse 18 “*But I say, have they never heard*? (Can Israel say to God, God I never heard of this good news?) *On the contrary, they have; “Their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world*.” Paul quotes Psalm 19 here and what’s interesting is that Psalm 19 is talking about how creation testifies and points to what’s called God’s general revelation, or the revelation that there is an all-powerful God that exists and He requires an account of His creatures. But Paul uses it to refer not only to the general revelation of God, but to what’s called the special revelation of God, where God has revealed Himself as Savior and not only as Creator. And the gospel has gone forth throughout all the world to the Jews. But then the question becomes, did Israel not know ahead of time that the gospel would go forth in this way? And Paul says, yes they did know, verses 19 and 20 “*But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says, “I will make you jealous by that which is not a nation, By a nation without understanding will I anger you. And Isaiah is very bold and says, “I was found by those who did not seek Me, I became manifest to those who did not ask for Me*.”

The first quote is from Deuteronomy 32 where God tells Israel that they will not obey Him in the future and refuse Him. So when that happens, God will make Israel jealous for the gospel by saving another pagan nation through the gospel. And God says in Isaiah 65 which is the second quote here in verse 20 to say that God those Gentiles who did not seek God found God and God revealed Himself to those who did not ask for God to reveal Himself. But what did Israel continue to do? They continued in their rebellion and sin and idolatry and ran after other gods. And so verse 21 Paul concludes by saying “*But as for Israel He says*, “*All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate (or stiff-necked) people*.” Romans 9 gives us the divine sovereignty perspective of why people did not believe in Jesus, it’s because God didn’t chose them for salvation. But I say “did not” as opposed to “do not” believe because there are some whom we know that currently “do not” believe in Jesus. But we cannot write them off as being non-elect. We don’t know who the elect are! They could turn their life around to the Lord last minute!

Even if someone cursed and blasphemed God until they drew their last breath, we can’t say for sure whether they are in hell or not. They could have believed in Jesus as their Lord and Savior right before they transitioned into eternity. But in a general sense, from a divine sovereignty perspective God says not all believe in Him because He has chosen only some to believe out of all to make known the riches of His mercy upon vessels of mercy. But here in this chapter, chapter 10, we get the human responsibility perspective. It’s the same coin, but we are looking at the other side of the coin and that side says that people don’t believe because the refuse to submit themselves to the righteousness of God. They seek to establish their own righteousness, through their own good works. And God says that He has provided many revelations of His plan of salvation, of this good news, and has sent many preachers of the gospel through the prophets and apostles of the Old and New to proclaim the good news so that we are informed and understand what is required to receive this salvation. No one can say to God, “God I was ignorant of the requirements of salvation or what that salvation was,” and no one can say “God you didn’t provide me the means in which I could get to salvation.” No, if you don’t believe in Jesus and don’t confess Him as Lord, you are fully responsible for that sin and unbelief. You will have to answer for why you don’t believe and you will find that you will no one to blame but yourself. And the penalty for that will be everlasting shame and torment in the lake of fire. Don’t even try to establish your own good works or your own righteousness. If you do, it will be like digging your own grave. It will be like taking a shovel and shoveling out the foundations and dirt underneath you and you will sink lower and lower into the grave until you are buried 6 feet under. You may have zeal for God, but if it’s not based on God’s righteousness through Christ, you mind as well live a pagan lifestyle of sin.

You must have a zeal with saving knowledge. What is that saving knowledge? It’s knowing that God sees your righteousness as filthy menstrual cloths. It’s knowing that Jesus’ righteousness alone can save you from your sins. It’s knowing that to confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead not only means you know as fact Jesus is God, but that He is your personal Lord in which He commands you to joyfully follow Him in a life long obedience to Him. Have you confessed Him as Lord? Have you believed in Him in that way? Have you called on His might name to save you? “*And there is salvation in no one else (not in your works, not in yourself, not in your parents, not your in religion), for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”* Let’s pray