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Unshakeable: Romans / Romans 9:30–10:13

I'm sure that many of you have heard of the church reformer Martin Luther... No, not Martin Luther King, the leader of the civil rights movement, but long, long before him, in the early 1500s. Martin Luther was a father of the Protestant Reformation. Luther is known most for the alone saying, salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone.

But Luther had his own long journey to get to that point. He knew what it was to try to earn righteousness, to earn God's affection.

In 1505 he walked away from law school and joined a monastery.

Luther wanted to be right with God more than anything, so he threw himself at it. He fasted until he made himself sick. He went without sleep. He'd spend hours in confession, walk out, remember one more sin, and turn around and go right back in.

Years later he said, "If ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery, it was I."

But here's the thing: none of it worked. The harder he tried, the further away God felt. He never knew if he'd done enough.

There was one phrase that haunted him as he read Romans: the righteousness of God.

He said he hated that phrase, because he felt that as hard as he tried, he could never live up to that righteousness. If that's the kind of righteousness that God requires, I'll never be enough.

But he kept reading Romans, and he found what you and I have found as we've journeyed through this great epistle of Paul. That the righteousness of God is not something we earn, but it is something that we receive by faith in Christ.

That we cannot be made right with God by our own efforts, but only by trusting in the finished work of Christ. Faith alone, through Christ alone.

Righteousness was something Martin Luther stumbled over, but it became the rock he stood on.

I wonder if some of us know that feeling. We're sincere, we're busy for God, and we're still not sure we've done enough.

That's exactly what Paul is teaching us once again in our passage this morning.

That Christ brings the end to earning righteousness through the law.

Some celebrate that, some embrace it. But some stumble over it.

See, the same Christ that some stumble over is the same Christ others stand on.

Which one is Christ to you? Is He a stumbling block, or is He the Rock you stand on?

In chapter 9-11, Paul is dealing with the question of Israel and the gospel. And mainly it's the question of why isn't Israel responding to the gospel, where does Israel fit in and what about God's promises to them in the Old Testament? Have they failed?

And Paul's answer so far has been, they haven't failed. The promise was never to every physical descendant of Abraham, but to the children of promise, a remnant God has chosen, and we found out last time that includes Gentiles.

That God has not only chosen people out of Israel for a promise, but Gentiles to form for himself one group of people.

But now Paul looks at the same question from the other side: not what God has done, but how Israel has responded.

It's almost as though what happens here is Paul goes from the zoomed-out view, to the zoomed in. He goes from showing us the bigger picture, to showing us what it looks like in the details.

From the bigger picture, the zoomed-out view God is sovereign over the election of His saints but zoomed in is how people respond to the call of the gospel.

We said last time that we have to live in that tension, that tension of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. That God's sovereignty doesn't negate human responsibility, and there is a real tension there and we see this in back-to-back passages.

Yes, God sovereignly chooses those who belong to Him in eternity past, but His sovereign will play out in real human choices.

It's as if early in chapter 9 Paul peels back the curtain of eternity to show us how things works from God's viewpoint, from God's perspective. That nothing happens that is outside His control, or His will or His plan. That He declares the end from the beginning and the beginning from the end.

It's a behind the scenes view that leaves us with some mystery, but then the curtain is put back in place, and we're brought back to seeing things from our perspective.

From God's perspective, He is not surprised that Israel isn't responding to the gospel it is part of His divine plan and initiative. From human perspective, the gospel Jesus Christ has come as the rock for them to believe and stand on, but instead, Israel has stumbled over Him, they have rejected Him.

And that raises the question, doesn't it? How does that happen? How do the people who had the law, the promises and the prophets end up tripping over the very one all of it was pointing to?

It's important to understand for Israel, but it's important for you and I to understand as well.

Is it possible for you and I to come to church every week, to read, listen and understand God's Word, to have a passion, a zeal for the Lord and yet still stumble when it comes to Christ?

Why do some stumble?

We stumble when we bring our own righteousness.

WE STUMBLE WHEN WE BRING OUR OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS

We stumble over Christ when we try to bring our own righteousness with us.

That's what happened with Israel.

Look with me at verse 30.

Romans 9:30–32 ESV

³⁰ What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone...

Paul is asking the question, how is it that Gentiles who are coming to Jesus can find righteousness, but Israel who is so devout in understanding and following the law, is not able to find that same righteousness?

That's the issue, right, that word righteousness, remember it's all about our right standing with God. How can I be right with God, how can I be righteous in God's eyes?

That's the great human issue, because try as we might, we fail, we fall.

Every one of us is guilty of sin and righteousness in God's eyes is without blemish. We fall short of the mark; it's like a test where the only passing score is 100%.

And some of us maybe, maybe we score high on that test, you're good people, you score 90-95%, maybe even 98%. I'm not sure I'd score that high, but maybe some of you... but 99.9999% is still not enough.

So the question is how do we get 100% righteous? Well, Israel thought that the law was the way. That all we need is more obedience. And they were strict on that obedience, down to obeying the Sabbath and how many steps you could take on the Sabbath.

But try as they might, as hard as they could, they could not attain righteousness through the law.

Because the law goes deeper than just actions, the law is about the desires of the heart. And so I could never murder a person in my life but be filled with hatred and anger and bitterness and still be guilty. Do you see?

They were so focused on the detail of the law, they forgot the purpose of the law, it was never just about obedience; it was about living in relationship with the God who created them for Himself.

I mean, imagine this for a moment here. Imagine you're married and you find that your spouse is just angry with you all the time, you're just not seeing eye to eye.

But you found out that if you just made the bed the right way, they seemed to be happy, if you just came home from work at the right time, did the dishes, or help with the laundry that they seemed to be happy. Certain things you did that seemed to make them happy.

And so you made a list of things that you needed to do every day, every week to keep them happy. And you had that list and every day you did your duty and checked the box but found out that the more you focused on your list the distant your marriage felt.

it wouldn't work, would it? Because it was never about the list was it, it was about your heart, it was about relationship. It was about the motivation behind the act, the love behind it the whole time.

Israel thought that by obeying God's rules they could be right with God, but God wanted more than just their obedience, He wanted their hearts.

You know, I think we can often make the same mistake; we can stumble in the same way, can't we? We can make the mistake of minimizing the Christian life down to just obedience, just following the right rules.

Don't get me wrong, obedience is important, but there is so much more to living in relationship with God, than just obeying His rules. We could be so focused on the things we have to do; we need to go to church and read God's Word and make sure we pray and make sure we're giving our tithes and offering and making sure we're serving and helping.

But none of that is what makes us right with God. None of that matter if our hearts are not right with the Lord.

Here is the issue, Paul gives us for where they fell short, they did not succeed in reaching the law, verse 32 why? ***Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as it were based on works.***

That's the issue, the issue is that their obedience was not a response of faith, but a work they thought gained them something. Faith comes first and the result of faith is obedience.

We recognize that we have nothing to bring to the Lord, we have nothing to offer Him, that our best works of righteousness are nothing more than filthy rags in His sight. We come to Him in faith trusting that even though my righteousness is not enough, that Christ's righteousness is enough for me.

That Jesus did for me what I could not do, He lived a righteous life on my behalf, and He paid the penalty for my unrighteousness on the cross. By faith His righteousness becomes mine.

Faith first, obedience comes as a fruit of that faith. Obedience is the response of faith... It's like in that marriage, those deeds, those acts that you are demonstrating to your spouse, you don't do them to gain their love, you do them in response to love, it is a fruit of the relationship.

If I have to do something to gain your love, your affection, that's not love, that's manipulation.

This causes people to stumble, it's what caused Israel to stumble, it causes people to stumble today, that's what Paul is saying, do you see it there in verses 32 and 33?

Romans 9:32–33 ESV

***They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,³³ as it is written,
“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”***

Paul is quoting the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, and he's showing us that Isaiah spoke of a stone, a rock that would come out of Israel and this stone it would cause some to stumble, and it would cause some to stand.

Some will stumble because we can't get over the fact that there is nothing we can do, just believe, nothing we can do, but trust in Christ and His righteousness.

It's a stumbling block because it's a strike to our pride. There has to be something I can bring, something I have to offer, you mean nothing, absolutely nothing I have, I hold is worth something for salvation?

It's what makes that teaching from earlier in chapter 9 about election so difficult it's humbling that you mean I have nothing to offer, nothing at all, that even my faith in Jesus is not of my own doing but God's work in me.

It's humbling, that even if we say we believe that we don't have to earn God's righteousness, we still live like it. We still have this sense in us that if we do the right things the right way that God somehow has a greater affection for me on the days when I get things wrong.

We stumble because it's humbling. See here's the tricky part about bringing our own righteousness, when we think we're doing everything right, it comes with a false sense of passion, a zeal.

That's what Paul says in those next verses.

Romans 10:2-3 ESV

² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

They have a zeal for God. Why? Well, because look at my righteousness, look at my righteous acts, look how holy I am, look how close to God I am.

We think because we have these outward religious righteous acts that it somehow sets us apart, makes us closer to God.

They are like the Pharisees in the temple praying Lord, I thank you that I am not like other sinners, there is this false sense of pride, this false sense of equating righteous deeds with relationship.

But, do you notice what Paul says? They have a passion, a zeal, but it's not according to knowledge, but in verse 3, he says they're actually ignorant.

Seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

That word submit... stop trying to create your own righteousness, stop trying to create your own way to God, stop trying to earn God's affection and just submit.

It's humbling.

Submit, yield, surrender and instead of being that righteous pharisee that Jesus talks about listing all their righteous deeds, be more like the tax collector who falls on his knees outside the temple and beats his chest crying out, "Oh Lord have mercy on me a sinner."

See, those who are willing to humble themselves, to surrender, to submit to Christ, He isn't the stone they stumble over, He becomes the rock they stand on.

That dual work of that stone, in verse 33 again,

A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to some, but whoever believe in him will not be put to shame.

Which one is He to you? Is He the stone you stumble on, or the rock you stand on?

It's like that old hymn we used to sing, nothing in my hands I bring, but simply to the cross I cling.

We stumble when we try to bring our own righteousness.

If we stumble by trying to bring our own righteousness, then how can I stand? What does that look like?

Here's what Paul says, here's how we stand.

WE STAND WHEN WE TRUST WHAT HE'S ALREADY DONE

We stand when we trust what He's already done.

When we try to earn our way, we stumble, we stand when we trust what He's already done.

Romans 10:5-7 ESV

⁵ For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. ⁶ But the righteousness based on 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 abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

See, Paul wants us to know that his teaching about the law is nothing new, he loves to go back to the Old Testament especially for his Jewish readers and he

quotes some words from Moses to show that Moses tells us we can't keep just part of the law.

Moses said to us the person who does the commandments shall live by them, which could mean at least two things, that one, you can't pick and choose which commandments you want to obey and which ones you don't. If you obey one, you obey the other.

But it also means that the commandments are interconnected, that if you break one, you've broken them all.

If you don't have any idols that your worship, but you covet something your neighbour has, well you've just broken the idols law because that thing you coveted has just become an idol to you, the law are all interconnected.

Paul is trying to just reestablish for us how absolutely futile it is to try to earn your righteousness.

Stop trying to earn something you don't have the ability to earn, but he also says stop trying to accomplish a work that is already finished.

Do you see what Paul says there in verses 6 and 7?

Romans 10:6-7 ESV

⁶ *But the righteousness based on 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 abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).*

Think about what Paul is saying there... do not say who will ascend into heaven, which is to bring Christ down. He's simply saying, hey let me ask you, do you have the power to go to heaven and send Christ down from heaven, no you don't. And neither do you have to because it's already been done.

God has already done for you and I what we could not do for ourselves, He's already sent His Son to the world. To be the sacrifice for our sin.

But then Paul says, do not say who will descend into the abyss, that is to bring Christ up from the dead.

Not only do you and I not have the power to send Christ down, but we don't have the power to raise Him from the dead, do you have the power to raise Christ from the dead?

But you and I don't have to, because the one who does have that power has already done it.

Do you see what He's saying? He's saying stop trying to do a work that's already been done, stop trying to do a work that you cannot do.

Only God can accomplish salvation for you and me, and the only one who is able to do it has already done it.

I like to think I can handle the odd jobs around the house. But there are times when a repair goes beyond my ability.

A few months ago we decided to put up a wall in our basement with a sliding barn door. And that's a project that went way beyond my skill level.

But I'm grateful that there was a brother from our church family who was skilled and willing to do it for us. And he had it done faster and better than I ever could have. Honestly, I couldn't have done it at all.

But can you imagine if, after he packed up his tools and went home, I went downstairs, picked up a hammer, and started trying to build that wall again? Not only do I not have the ability, it's already done. The wall is standing.

And that's what Paul is saying. Stop trying to do a work that's already been done.

So then what do we do? You stand and trust in that work that is already completed.

Look what he says in verses 8-10.

Romans 10:8-10 ESV

⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Listen to those words here, like maybe you're here this morning and you're wondering how is it that I can become a follower of Jesus, how can I place my faith in Jesus, how can I make a decision to follow Jesus today?

It tells us right there, that you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead and you will be saved.

It's that simple, and yet it's so much more than just uttering a few words and giving an intellectual nod to facts.

Confess carries the idea of a public declaration of commitment, it's not a private thing. It's something that you let the world know, I have decided to follow Jesus. I have embraced Jesus as my Lord.

It's not just a quiet prayer, it's not just words you utter in a dark corner, which may be where it starts, but faith in Jesus is meant to be lived and known in the public.

It's one of the reasons why, when we do baptisms, we ask the person being baptised to publicly confess their faith in Christ. We know you've done it between you and the Lord; we know you've told a pastor or a friend, but in the hearing of these witnesses do you confess Jesus as Lord.

Lord... that's a loaded phrase. Why confess that Jesus is Lord? Well, it really has two meanings, the immediate context is who you are confessing Jesus to be, Lord there is not just a dignitary title, but it's a confession that Jesus Christ is God.

He is more than just a great man or teacher you want to follow, He is more than just a prophet, which doesn't go far enough, do you confess that Jesus Christ is

God, God in human flesh. It's one thing to confess that Jesus was a historic man and teacher it's another thing to confess that He is Lord, that He is God, that He is Yahweh.

But Lord is a title of master, He's not just my God, He is my master and I am the servant. He is Lord and I am not, He is Lord and I have no other Lords, no other gods over me.

It's a statement of submission, it's a statement of yielding your will to His, He is Lord over my life, my will, my passion, my dreams. He is Lord over my marriage, my family, my job, my finances, my career, Jesus is Lord over every area of my life.

No wonder Paul says elsewhere no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.

If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved...

Believe in your heart... Paul isn't just talking about an emotional response, this isn't just about tears coming to your eyes and feeling warm and fuzzy all over, but the heart in the New Testament is the centre of a person's being, the central control centre of passions, emotions, thoughts, it's the deepest part of who you are, it's what makes you, you.

This belief that you have in your heart goes to the deepest part of you and encompasses all of you, you believe with everything that you are that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead.

That's interesting, isn't it? Not just that Jesus died for you, anyone can believe that. Anyone can accept that because anyone can die for you, anyone can lay down their life for you.

But only one person can take that life back up again, only one person has the power to lay their life down and take it up again.

The whole of our Christian faith is built on this historic act, this historic moment of humanity. That Jesus Christ walked out of that tomb.

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is alive today? Do you serve a risen Saviour? because if He is still dead, then you and I are still in our sin, we are still in need of forgiveness.

If Jesus Christ did not rise from the dead; if He has rotted in a tomb 2000 years ago, then His sacrifice is for nothing.

But Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead and it is the affirmation that He is, in fact, who He said He is, that He has done what He promised He would do, that He has paid the debt, set us free, that He is alive and we are to live in Him. Do you believe in your heart that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead?

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

You know what Paul is saying? It's really that simple. We stumble when we make it more than that. We stumble when we try to bring our own righteousness into it. Stop trying to earn what God has already done through His Son, stop trying to do a work that has already been done and learn what it means to simply stand, to simply trust.

Paul ends with this promise.. do you see it there?

Here is the promise.

No one who puts their trust in Him will be put to shame.

NO ONE WHO TRUSTS HIM IS PUT TO SHAME

That's the promise.

Romans 10:11-13 **ESV**

¹¹ For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same

Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. ¹³ For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Do you notice that Paul repeats himself?

In fact, this section is bracketed by that promise, he ends chapter 9, says whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame and then he ends this section with that same promise, Everyone who believe in Him will not be put to shame.

It's almost as though he wants us to be sure of this promise, absolute about it. And he wants us to know that this isn't a promise that just comes from him, it's a promise that God has declared in His Word.

It's a promise that God has made to you and me this morning. That if you are willing to put your faith in Him, if you are willing to trust in His promise of His Son Jesus Christ. He promises you, you will not be put to shame, you will not be disappointed.

See that word believe, notice it's used interchangeably with trust, to believe is trust, it carries the idea of relying on something. That something is going to hold you up. That if you put your weight on it, it won't break, you won't fall.

I think that's important to see because if you're like me, you've put your trust in some bad places at times, promises that didn't come through, people who let you down, deals that fell through.

But God's promise to you this morning is if you put your trust in Him, He'll never let you down. He's the rock that you can stand on.

You and I can have confidence in that promise, because it's not based on you or me. If it was, we would be much like Luther, always wondering if we measure up, if we've done enough, have we reached that 100% mark?

But God is saying just put your trust in me, believe in the promise that is available through my Son Jesus Christ, and you never have to wonder, you'll never be put to shame.

And the great wonder of this promise this morning is just how far reaching; how indiscriminate it is.

Everyone who believes in Him, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will not be put to shame, they will be saved.

Everyone, it doesn't matter if you've grown up in the church your whole life or if you've just walked in today, it doesn't matter if you've lived a clean life or messy, doesn't matter if you come from a broken home, a broken family or a stable one, whoever, everyone.

If you are here this morning and you are willing to put your trust and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ you will be saved.

And it doesn't matter what your ethnic background is, do you see that? There is no distinction between Jew and Greek for the same Lord is Lord of all.

Everyone includes who God is calling out of Israel and the from the Gentiles. It doesn't matter what country you were born in, what ethnicity, what language, what colour, what gender, He is the God of all.

Call on Him today, trust in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

Christ is either a stumbling block for you this morning, or He is the rock you stand on.

If you think that you have to earn your way to God, if you try to bring your own righteousness, if you are here depending on good works and good deeds to make you right with God, you will stumble over Jesus every time.

But if you are here this morning and willing to humble yourself and recognize that you have nothing to offer Him, but that God has done everything that needs to be done in Jesus, if you are here and you confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, then Christ becomes that rock you can stand on, the stone you build your life upon.