How Will They Hear?

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Unshakeable: Romans / Romans 10:14–11:6

Back in the late 1700's there was a shoemaker that lived in a small English village. He didn't have much education. He spent his days at a workbench repairing shoes. The story goes that on the wall of that little shop he had a homemade map of the world, and while he worked, he'd look up at it and pray.

He'd look at all those countries, and he couldn't get past one thought: there are millions of people out there who have never once heard the name of Jesus.

And he thought to himself… if no one goes, how will they ever hear?

That man's name is William Carey. And in 1793 William Carey left England, got on a ship, and went to India to share the gospel.

And it was hard. Harder than he ever imagined. He lost his young son. His family suffered. He worked day after day, learning the language, sharing the gospel, preaching every chance he got.

And for seven years, not one person came to faith.

Seven years.

I can only imagine how many times he lay awake in bed crying out to the Lord, God I know you've brought me for a reason, I know I heard you right.

Like, let's be honest, reaching people with the gospel is hard work, it's not easy. And many times it seems from our perspective that nothing is happening.

And it may have seemed like that for years until one day.

One day in December of 1800, a carpenter named Krishna Pal heard the gospel, believed, and was baptized in the river at Serampore.

And Krishna Pal didn't stop there. He spent the rest of his life telling others about Jesus himself.

See, what William Carey couldn't see during those seven years was that God was at work the whole time.

And maybe that's where some of us are this morning. We've shared with a friend, a family member, a co-worker. We've prayed for years. And it feels like nothing is happening.

Here's what Paul wants us to see as we open up Romans 10 this morning:

The gospel is worth sharing because God is always doing more than we can see.

Let's read our passage together. Romans chapter 10, starting in verse 14.

Chapters 9, 10 and 11 have been all about how the gospel has been progressing through the generations. The question is, has God turned His back on His promise to Israel and the answer Paul has given us is absolutely not.

Paul has answered this question from two perspectives.

From God's perspective His promises were never to every physical descendant of Israel, but to an Israel of promise. Out of Israel, God has been choosing for Himself a people of promise and Jews who are responding are part of the promise, the remnant.

From our perspective, the gospel has gone out to Israel, but they have rejected it, they have rejected it because Christ has served as a stumbling block to Israel. They stumble over Him because He brings an end to the era of trying to earn our right standing before God through the law and obedience, but through Jesus we come to God by faith and we trust in Christ's righteousness and not in our own.

And the promise that we left off with, is that though Jesus serves as a stumbling block to those who want to earn their way to God, He is a rock that we can stand on for those who trust in Him.

That indeed, everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame. Everyone, Jew, Gentile, man, woman, child, everyone, whoever will call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Everyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved, I love that word will. It's an absolute isn't it? There's no mystery about it, no hidden messages, no false assurance if you call on the name of the Lord today you will be saved.

If, as Paul says in 10:9, you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved… you will.

What an amazing promise, what an amazing message of good news. What joy that would bring to the billions of people out there in the world looking for hope, looking for answers, looking for peace.

But it brings us back to that question of our friend and brother William Carey. How can they call on that name if they've never heard that name?

If everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved, how can they call on Him if they've never heard of Him?

That's a great question to ask, isn't it?

In verse 14 Paul puts it this way.

Romans 10:14 ESV

14 ***How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?***

The Joshua Project is a ministry that tracks where the gospel has and hasn't reached, and according to their research there are over 7,000 people groups in the world today that are still considered unreached. That means there are few or no followers of Jesus among them, not enough to reach their own people.

That's over 3.6 billion people. Almost half the people on this planet.

And here's what really struck me this week. Almost half of those unreached people groups are in South Asia. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal. Nearly 1.9 billion people.

For some of us in this room, that's not a statistic. That's our neighbours back home. That's our extended family.

But we don't even have to cross an ocean.

According to that same research, there are 56 unreached people groups living right here in Canada. Almost three million people. Many of them in cities just like ours.

You and I don't need to go across the world to find people who have never heard. We just need to go across the street. Into our neighbourhoods. Our schools. Our classrooms. Our workplaces.

The person in the next cubicle. The parent we see every day at pickup. The neighbour we wave to but have never really talked to.

How will they call on Him if they've never heard?

That's where Paul takes us first this morning.

PEOPLE NEED TO HEAR THE GOSPEL

Romans 10:14–17 ESV

14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

This much is clear, that people need to hear the gospel.

Notice verse 17, it's so crucial.

Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

In other words, if someone is going to confess faith in Jesus Christ, that faith is going to come only when they hear the word of Christ, or the word about Christ.

It means that we actually have to open up our mouths and tell them about Jesus. That's important.

People need to hear the gospel. Why hear? Well because that was the main vehicle of communication back in Paul's day.

It was extremely expensive to print anything. When Paul sent a letter or when the gospels were sent out to the different churches, it was usually only one copy of that letter, and it was read to the whole congregation and they would come together regularly and hear the Word of Christ shared.

Fast forward to our day and age when we have not just paper, but internet and radio and podcasts and social media. We can extend what Paul is saying here to that people need to be exposed to the Word of Christ, they need to hear, read it, take it in.

But they have to hear the gospel somehow, some way.

It's why we preach the gospel, because it is through the preaching of the Word that God's people hear and are saved. It is through the Sunday morning message, the conversation over coffee, the interaction at the dinner table, the pamphlet handed out, the friend asking them to come to church, the social media post, it is through the proclamation of God's Word that God has declared that His people will hear the gospel and believe and so we preach, we must.

It's important because there are so many who equate being a good person with being a witness for Jesus. And I think there is some good sentiment there, that we represent Jesus every where we go in the way we talk and live and treat people.

And that is true, you don't want people to know you follow Jesus and you're a jerk, you don't want to proclaim that you live for Jesus but are out getting drunk and high with the rest of the crew or living in some other sinful lifestyle, that certainly isn't going to help if your life contradicts the truth you proclaim to believe.

But let's be clear… no one is getting saved because you're a nice person. No one is getting saved because you handed someone a bit of change on the side of the road, no one is getting saved because you shovelled their driveway or let them go ahead of you in line, people are not getting saved because we do nice things for them.

Nice things are important, they may open up a door, a relationship, but salvation isn't coming to that person until you open your mouth and tell them about Jesus.

Faith comes through hearing and hearing through the word of Christ, they have to hear the gospel.

Paul asks the question how are they to believe in Him of whom they've never heard, and how are they to hear without someone preaching? Someone has to share the message with them; someone has to tell them about Jesus.

That someone has to be you and me. And maybe, maybe the Lord will use you in the way He used Apostle Paul or Billy Graham, but maybe He'll use you to reach a few people in your lifetime. You know, it's interesting, when Jesus talks about bearing fruit for the Kingdom, He always talks about it in different multiples, some 100, 200, 300-fold, some multiply 2x, 5x 10x.

Not everyone produces the same fruit, not everyone reaches the same multiplication level, but we all are called to multiply, we all are called to reach someone.

Faith comes through hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ.

This shapes who we are as church, yes, it's part of our discipleship path, we gather, we grow, we give, and we go…

Part of being a disciple of Jesus is the going; we are all called to go.

Do you notice what Paul says here, he asks those rhetorical questions how are they to hear without someone preaching, and how are they to preach unless they are sent?

These are rhetorical questions, because we all know the answer. God has sent someone, He sent Jesus and guess what, Jesus has sent you.

Do you remember when we read Jesus' prayer in John 17 back in August, those words that Jesus prayed at the end?

He said, Father just as you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them.

God sent His Son into the world on a mission to seek and to save that which was lost. To preach that the Kingdom of God has come, that salvation is available, and Jesus says just as you have sent me, I have sent them back out into the world, to reach the world.

Jesus has not just saved you to keep you to Himself, He saved you and sent you.

How can they believe if they've never heard, how can they hear unless someone shares and how can they share unless they have been sent.

Someone has been sent, that someone is you, so that you would share, so that they would hear and they can believe.

Stop asking who God has sent, because He has sent you, He has sent me.

People need to hear the gospel.

And let me say this, because I think it's important. This belief, this truth from God's Word that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ, shapes not just how we disciple and share. It shapes how we do outreach. It shapes who we partner with in international ministry.

There are a lot of good missions organizations doing good and necessary work. Organizations that bring fresh drinking water where it's needed, or dig a well, or establish a school. Organizations doing good, necessary justice work: helping people out of poverty, bringing medical aid, rescuing people from human trafficking.

Those are all good and necessary things that need to be done, and we have a heart to see them done. But the work doesn't stop there. If we've done everything we can to meet people's physical needs but have done nothing to meet their eternal needs, we've failed them.

See, we want to partner with organizations that do both. That bring the justice work together with the gospel work. That don't just bring fresh water but share the living water. That don't just teach kids how to read and write but teach them about Jesus. That don't just rescue people from poverty or trafficking but point them to the one who can set them free from sin and make them new.

Do you see? That's true missions work. Not just meeting physical needs, but eternal ones. We don't just want to see people delivered from suffering. We want to see them delivered from sin and come to know the joy of knowing the Creator who made them for Himself.

And that shapes how we do outreach right here in our own community too. When we serve our neighbours, when we run a program or host an event or meet a need, we're not just trying to do nice things. We do those things because we love people, and because we want every opportunity to share the hope of the gospel with them.

Because how will they hear if no one tells them?

People need to hear the gospel.

But here's the truth that we all realize. Not everyone who hears believes.

That's the hard truth. Not everyone who hears the gospel, obeys the gospel.

NOT EVERYONE WHO HEARS OBEYS

And I think we just need to accept that, realize that as we go and share.

Look at what Paul says there in verse 16.

Romans 10:16 ESV

[16] But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?"

They have not all obeyed the gospel.

I find that interesting, that Paul doesn't say they have not all believed, but obey.

The call of the gospel isn't just an invitation; it's a command. The command is to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and when someone chooses not to, it's not just an act of rejection, it's an act of disobedience to the God who created you.

And so often when we are the one sharing the gospel, we think it's maybe because there is something wrong with us. Like maybe, just maybe I didn't share it right, I didn't say the right things, I didn't have the right answers.

Or maybe we can start to think, is there something wrong with the message? Does the message lack some type of power.

I remember when I first started in ministry, and I was preaching my thought was man I have to be so convincing and smart and filled with wit. I've got to say the right thing in just the right way, study all the right arguments and answers to people's questions.

Yeah, then my sermons will be so convincing, so persuasive, people couldn't help but to be overcome with my charisma and logic they will be tripping over themselves to come to Jesus.

But to the surprise of no one but myself, it didn't happen like that.

Not everyone who hears obeys.

Why, is the problem that they didn't hear it right?

Paul asks and answers that questions there in verse 18.

Romans 10:18 ESV

18 But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for
"Their voice has gone out to all the earth,
and their words to the ends of the world."

Paul says no the issue isn't that they haven't heard, the voice has gone out to all the earth… in fact he's quoting there from Psalm 19

Psalm 19:1–4 ESV

1 The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
2 Day to day pours out speech,
4 Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

The point that he is making in that Psalm is that God has been revealing Himself in creation, the heavens have been declaring His glory, and the sky above proclaim His handiwork.

It's that idea of general revelation, that if you are looking for evidence that there is a God just look at creation around you, look at the intricate design and order, look at the skies and the vastness of a universe and it tells you that a greater being than all of this had to create it, it has to come from somewhere.

You could look at creation and see that there is an all powerful being, you can look at yourself and the very fact that you exist tells you that someone put you here, created you for a purpose, and you could look around at the world and see the brokenness, see death and pain and wondering there has to be more to life than this.

All of these questions would lead one to ask who is behind all of this it would lead you to seek out the living god…

The point that Paul is making is the point he made all the way back on Romans 1 that they are without excuse because God has revealed Himself to mankind, God since the beginning, has been revealing Himself to humanity, the problem is that humanity has supressed it and come up with their own explanations.

So the problem isn't that they haven't heard, they've just suppressed the truth.

But maybe they don't understand?

And this is where it comes back to God's sovereign work in salvation. We see it there in verse 19 and 20.

Romans 10:19–20 ESV

19 But I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says,
"I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation;
with a foolish nation I will make you angry."
20 Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,
"I have been found by those who did not seek me;
I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."

It brings back the question of Israel. Is Israel not responding because they don't understand that gospel?

No. And Paul doesn't give us an explanation other than to say God is doing a work right now in Israel. A work that he'll explain more in chapter 11, but in essence, Israel has rejected the gospel and so God has turned His attention to the Gentiles, but the plan of God is that Israel will get jealous of the work He is doing with the Gentiles and turn and respond back to God.

So even in the rejection God is still doing a sovereign work, He has a purpose.

I will make you jealous of a foolish nation who are not a nation, I have been found by those who did not seek me, those are references to Gentiles, and what

Paul is saying that even though we don't see the big picture, that God is doing a work that we cannot fully see. He is using His focus on the Gentiles to draw Israel back to Himself.

I think we have to realize that as we share the gospel. That we have no control over who responds and who doesn't. God is doing a work, even in the those who don't respond.

We are like the Sower, sowing the seed.

Jesus told a parable of the Sower who goes out to sow some seed. And some seed falls on soils that is hard and it's snatched away before it takes root, and the one who snatches it is the enemy, and some seed falls on soil that doesn't take deep root, it so it withers when the heat comes, these are those who respond only superficially with a shallow response, and some soil is choked out by weeds, that represent the cares of the world and trials or persecution.

But some seed, some seed, Jesus said, falls on good soil, fruitful soil that bears fruit for the Kingdom.

And the point that Jesus is making is that you and I are like the Sower when we share the Word.

Our job is to sow the seed, to simply share the gospel. We have no control over what kind of soil the seed falls on, that's not our job, that's not our worry. We leave that up to the will of God and the work of the Spirit.

But the Sower sows the word, and they sow enough of an abundance that it will fall on fruitful soil.

But it comes down to this, why don't people respond?

Paul says it there in verse 21.

Romans 10:21 ESV

[21] But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

What Paul says about Israel is true of all people. At the end of the day, you know why people don't respond to the gospel? Because of our sin, because we are a disobedient and contrary or rebellious people.

Because as Jesus said in John 3, people loved the darkness and hate the light as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4 because Satan has blinded their eyes to the truth of the gospel, Ephesians 2 people are dead in their trespasses and sin.

Some people don't respond to the gospel not because of you or the message, but because they love their sin, they don't want to let it go, they've been blinded by the enemy, there's no spiritual life and so they refuse to surrender.

Some seed just falls on rocky and hard soil and the only thing we can do is what Paul says way back in the beginning of chapter 10:1.

Romans 10:1 ESV

[1] Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

My prayer for them is that they would be saved. I share the gospel, but I can't make them believe, all I can do is pray that they would, pray that God would soften their hearts, that He would call them out of darkness, that He would give them life that He would shine the light of the glory of the gospel in their hearts today.

That is my prayer for some of you here even this morning. As this message may be falling on deaf ears and hard hearts, and minds that are closed. Your rejection of Jesus has nothing to do with the message, or the messenger, it has everything to do with the enemy having a hold of your heart and your unwillingness to obey and surrender. It has everything to do with your sin.

But do you see what God says? Even though, they are disobedient and contrary, it says all day long I have held out my hands.

All day long, even though you may have rejected Him over and over, God continues to hold out His hand to you, God continues to offer His salvation to

you, and if you are willing to hold out your hand today, God will bring you to Himself.

He is not willing that any should perish, but that all would come to saving faith.

People need to hear the gospel, it's true, we believe that.

But we know that not everyone is going to respond.

But here's what we trust.

We trust that in our sharing, in our preaching, that God is doing more than we can see.

MORE THAN WE CAN SEE

It's why Paul in the first six verses of chapter 11 reminds us of what God was going in Elijah's life.

Romans 11:1–6 ESV

1 I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. Do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he appeals to God against Israel? 3 "Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have demolished your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life." 4 But what is God's reply to him? "I have kept for myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." 5 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. 6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.

He brings us back to the original question of this whole section, has God rejected His people, Israel?

And he says absolutely not, in fact he says I am proof of it, I am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham from the tribe of Benjamin and I am a follower of Jesus, I believe in the gospel, and there are others like Paul.

So even though there is a large part of Jews who have rejected Jesus, there is a remnant.

And yet it can get discouraging sometimes can't it? It can get discouraging because it seems like even though there are some who respond, there are so many who reject the gospel. And so often being a follower of Jesus can be a lonely thing.

Paul says, you remember Elijah, when Elijah was depressed, and refused to eat because he felt like he was the only true follower of Yahweh left, he said you remember God's reply to him, God said, Elijah, just because you can't see it, doesn't mean nothing is going on,

I have kept for myself 7000 others who have not bowed the knee to Baal and Paul says God is doing that same work right now; there is still faithful remnant of Israel who call Jesus their Messiah today.

And I think that's important for you and I as well, isn't it? How often do you feel outnumbered out in the world? How often do you feel like you're the only one in your group of friends who is living for Jesus? You're the only one in your family living for Jesus? You're the only one in your school, the only one on your job?

It can be overwhelming when we live in a world, a society that is in total rebellion against the God we serve and the faith we have.

And so often we can feel alone, so often it seems like we're outnumbered.

I bet our brother William Carey felt like that. Seven years in a foreign land, seven years where he had to learn a language and culture. Seven years of no response.

And yet God was working, during those seven years William was not only learning Bengali, but working on translating the New Testament and it was ready for print just weeks after Krishna's baptism.

During those seven years God was raising up and preparing more workers to be sent into the labour of India.

Seven years, but God was still working. That's what He was saying to Elijah, it's what He's saying to you this morning.

You know maybe you've been labouring for years, maybe amongst a group of friends or in a neighbourhood or community. You've been building relationships, making connections praying for salvation and there are days it seems like no progress has been made.

Maybe you've been praying for your husband, your wife, your children, sharing but it seems to fall on deaf ears, praying, but not seeing much progress.

Trust that God is doing more than you can see. You're not called to be the Saviour; you can't do the saving.

You are just called to be faithful in sowing the seed. And you trust that God is doing a work.

And it's good news that it's God's work and not yours, not mine.

Because if God is the one who has to work, He is able to overcome every barrier that is put up, He is able to break down every wall, unlock deaf ears, open blind eyes, soften hard hearts. God is able to reach people in a way that you and I cannot.

Elijah thought he was alone. He wasn't. William Carey went seven years without seeing a single person respond. But God was working the whole time.

And the same God is at work today. In your neighbourhood. In your workplace. In your home. In the life of that person you've been praying for, for years.

So don't give up. Keep sowing. Keep praying. Keep sharing.

Because the gospel is worth sharing. God is always doing more than we can see.