

Hearing and Believing the Word of Christ – Romans 10:14-21

When we concluded last week in verse 13, we saw that those who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. We learned in Christ; salvation is free for all who call. Paul had just stressed that Jew and Gentile, with no distinction, will enjoy the fullness of God's salvation *if* they call on the name of the Lord. A natural question then would be, how do people come to call on the Lord? Or put another way, what are the ordinary means God uses to bring people to faith? Our text today helps us to see how hearing and believing the word of Christ, i.e. the gospel, are used by God to bring about salvation of the unbeliever *and* sanctification of the believer.

Believe half of what you see and none of what you hear. Perhaps you have heard this expression before. It is typically given as a warning to remind us to be cautious about accepting what we hear without proof or evidence. It can be helpful because the things you hear and even things you see can sometimes be misleading or even untrue. However, when it comes to the word of God contained in Scripture, we don't need the reminder of this expression because we naturally don't believe the word of Christ.

We do not want to hear, much less believe the word of Christ. Because of our sinful nature, we are naturally disobedient and contrary to God and his message of salvation. Throughout Scripture we see mankind's disobedience to God's message of salvation. Yet, Scripture has also revealed a God who sovereignly saves disobedient and contrary people by His grace. He does this through the word of Christ, which is the word *about* Christ. Scripture reveals that God also *sanctifies* believers by the gospel. And since God saves and sanctifies through the word of Christ, we need God to apply that word about Christ to our hearts. In Romans 10:14-21, we see how God applies the Word, or the gospel to us. You can see those printed there in the outline on page 6 of the worship guide. How does God apply the Word of Christ to our hearts? God causes us to hear the word of Christ and He causes us to believe the word of Christ.

Throughout the book of Romans, Paul has been explaining the message of salvation. In the immediate context of chapter 10, he is showing the members of the church in Rome how salvation comes by calling on the name of the Lord. Since calling on the name of the Lord in true faith is the only way to be saved, Paul lays out the way or the means God uses to bring someone to faith. Salvation from calling on the name of the Lord comes through hearing and believing the word of Christ.

Look at verse 14 and 15. Paul writes that calling on the name of the Lord comes from believing in the word of Christ, which comes from hearing the word of Christ, which comes from the preaching of the word of Christ, which comes from those who are sent to preach the word of Christ.

All of that is in verses 14 and 15, but verse 17 adds something more specific. He says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." All of these steps focus on one thing, or rather one person: Jesus Christ. And the word of Christ, i.e. the gospel, must be heard in order to be believed.

So Paul is laying out the ordinary means that God uses to cause a person to call on the name of the Lord, which is to say, to cause them to be saved. It starts with hearing. The word of Christ, the gospel, must be heard. It actually *centers* on hearing.

One of the primary means God has ordained to bring people to faith is the proclamation of the gospel, which we call evangelism. What is evangelism? Evangelism refers very specifically to telling people about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and calling them to faith in Him. Evangelism literally means "gospeling," or "good newsing." Since gospel refers to a message of good news, if we are "gospeling"—if we are conducting evangelism—we are declaring a message. We can do so by speaking words, writing them on a piece of paper, or typing them in an e-mail, but the key point is that true evangelism means declaring content. Evangelism is one of the greatest privileges that God gives to the church. In fact, it is commanded in Matthew 28:19-20. "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." God saves by the proclaiming of the gospel. That is why it is so important for the church, the people of God, to be engaged in sharing the good news of Christ. God uses it to cause people to call on His name.

But there are other steps involved in this process. A preacher must be sent; the sent preacher must preach the good news; the preached good news must be heard; the heard good news must be believed; and the belief must be the kind that causes one to call on God for salvation.

A couple of things to note here in this process. Paul asks how anyone can hear without someone preaching to him. The answer to Paul's question is that they will not. No one is going to hear about Jesus unless somebody tells them. Nobody is going to believe a gospel they have never heard, and without a preacher they will never hear it. There is no other way people can be saved. God could have preached his word from the clouds without any human participation, but he chose the means to accomplish it, chiefly, preaching. That is one reason why we hold the preaching of the Word in such high esteem. It is one of the main ways God saves people. The preaching of the word of Christ, which is crucial, must be preaching that is the word *about* Christ. We will unpack that more in a moment, but the preaching of the word must be Christ centered. It must magnify Christ.

Paul then asks, "And how can they preach unless they are sent?" (v. 15). The Latin word for send is *missia*, from which we get the word *mission*. Missionaries are sent. We see throughout the pages of the Old Testament that God anointed prophets and sent them to people.

Hebrews 1 reminds us, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke (hearing) to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son (hearing), whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power."

The word of his power must be proclaimed. Not everyone in the church is called to be a missionary, but every member of the church is responsible to make sure that the missionary activity gets done. It is our duty, yours and mine, to see to it that the preachers are sent out.

You may not be called to teach or preach or be a missionary, but you are called to use your resources to help send out the preachers into a lost world.

It reminds me of those videos for cochlear implants. Like the people in the videos, sinners need something outside of themselves to cause them to hear. They need God to open their ears. God must cause sinners to hear the word of Christ.

Hearing is part of the ordinary or normal way that God has ordained to bring a person to salvation.

Now "hearing" can be done from a verbal standpoint or visual standpoint. You can hear it with your ears or read it with your eyes. The point is, in order for a message to be communicated and understood it may take more than hearing to understand it but it cannot take less than hearing. It has to be heard. This applies to the word of Christ as well. There is more to believing it than just hearing but it must first be heard to be believed.

Case in point is Israel. Look at verse 18. Paul is pointing out that Israel has heard the word of Christ. The message has gone out. But they have not believed. "But I ask, have they not heard?" In other words, "Have not these conditions of sending and preaching and hearing been met?" And Paul answers, "Indeed they have." Then Paul uses the words of [Psalm 19:4](#) to emphasize this. "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."

They have heard but not heeded the Word. Why? Because they are naturally disobedient and contrary to God and His message. They did not want to hear. And much like the Israelites and the Gentiles in the Old Testament, we do not want to hear the word of Christ. Therefore, what they needed and what we need is for God to open our ears to hear the gospel. It is only by God's power and through His grace that we can hear the word of Christ.

If you have never called on the name of the Lord, the hearing of the gospel is necessary for you. If you have never trusted in the word of Christ, his life, death, and resurrection, you need the gospel. You need God to open your ears to the truth that Christ's righteousness is the only hope for your salvation.

If you are born again and have called on the name of the Lord, you need to hear the gospel as well. You need God to continue to open your ears to the truth that Christ's righteousness and obedience is the only hope for your sanctification. 1 Peter 1:24 "Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding *word* of God; for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the *word* of the Lord remains forever." And this *word* is the good news that was preached to you."

Not only must God cause us to hear the gospel, He must also cause us to heed or believe the gospel. Look at verse 19 and 21.

Paul underlines this need to heed and not reject the word of Christ in verses 19-20, "But I ask, did Israel not understand [literally: "know"]? First Moses says, 'I will make you jealous of those

who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry." In other words, the fact that pagan, uncircumcised, unclean, uninstructed Gentiles are believing on the Messiah and inheriting the promises made to the Israelites was predicted by Moses, and is happening all around them and should waken them to the truth of the gospel they are rejecting.

So, what is the issue here in Romans 10? Though the Israelites have heard the gospel, they have not obeyed. You can see that there in verse 16. But verse 18 tells us it that the word has gone out. That is what is meant by the "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."

Then he says it again in verse 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.'" In other words, Gentiles are finding salvation in Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah, just as Isaiah prophesied. They are being saved by faith alone, not by works of the law. All this was a megaphone to make the message of free grace through the Messiah Jesus understandable to Israel.

But Paul draws the sad conclusion in verse 21: "But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'" In other words, all the prophecies and all the fulfillments and all the gospel that Israel heard was not believed by most of them.

Though the Israelites have heard the message of God's salvation, they did not believe. Their hearing did not lead to heeding the Word. But look and wonder at how [Romans 10:21](#) describes God's relation to Israel's unbelief - and our unbelief: God says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people." So here is a picture of God beckoning, calling, inviting, wooing through his prophets and preachers. But the hearers do not believe; they are "disobedient and contrary."

Dr. R.C. Sproul refers to this dynamic in his commentary on Romans. He distinguishes between a necessary condition and a sufficient condition. He writes that hearing is a necessary condition for believing, for calling on the name of the Lord, but hearing is not a sufficient condition for calling on the name of the Lord. If you ever participated in an outdoor survival course or even just took physical science as a middle or high schooler, you may remember the components needed for a fire. It is sometimes referred to as the fire triangle. The necessary components of a fire are: oxygen, fuel, and heat. Each of these components are necessary for fire to occur but none of them by themselves are *sufficient* for fire to occur. Otherwise, every time we inhale our lungs would catch on fire.

The same is true of the gospel message, the message of salvation. Hearing the gospel is necessary to produce faith but it is not sufficient to produce faith. If that were the case, everyone that has heard the gospel would have called on the name of the Lord. Everyone would be a Christian. But that is not what we see, is it? That is certainly not the case with the Jews that Paul is speaking about.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Question #89 asks how is the Word made effectual to salvation? The answer is - The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching (or hearing), of the Word, an effectual means of convincing or converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation. In order for the Israelites or the

Gentiles or us or anyone to call on the name of the Lord to be saved, God must cause them to believe the word of Christ, the word about Christ, the gospel. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. For the Jew and the Greek. For all those who are lost. For all those who are naturally disobedient and contrary.

The unbeliever needs God to open his ears to hear the gospel and to open his heart to believe the gospel and be saved. Therefore, we should ask God to bring the Word to those who are lost and we should ask God to allow us to be a part of that. It is the gospel that brings salvation and peace between the sinner and the God who reigns. It is the gospel that produces sanctification in the believer. It is God who must cause the gospel to be preached to the heart of sinners and believers. Salvation for the sinner and sanctification for the believer.

God has ordained that we be justified by faith but that we express that faith over and over throughout life, calling on the Lord for deliverance and help in a thousand ways. You see this again and again in the Psalms, and in the gospels. "I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.", "When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him." "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth."

Calling on the name of the Lord involves hearing the word of Christ preached. Paul tells us as much in verses 14-15 as he describes the ordinary means God has ordained to communicate the gospel message. In order to lead to or result in faith, the message must be about Christ. It must tell the good news of his life and death given as a ransom for sinners. His righteousness given to those that were not seeking God, for those that were in fact disobedient and contrary to God. So, in order to hear this message, God has to open the ears of those who are not seeking. We see throughout the gospels as Jesus preaches and teaches the word about himself, he says if anyone has ears to hear, let them hear. Ears to hear means something has to be done to cause them to hear. God must cause them to hear. They don't hear naturally. Do you have ears to hear? Pray and ask God to open your ears to truly hear the word of Christ.

We also see that in addition to hearing the word of Christ, calling on the name of the Lord involves believing that Word. It involves having faith that the word about Jesus is true and trustworthy and the only hope of salvation. God must also grant this faith to the unbeliever. He must cause the gospel to be applied to the hearts of sinners. Therefore, we pray that God will, by the preaching and hearing of His word, bring sinners to faith in Christ. It's the salvation of [Romans 8:28](#) – all things working together for our good – forever. And he says that this blessing comes through calling on the Lord. If that is you, if you have heard and believed the word of Christ today, the gospel, call on the name of the Lord.

But what if you are born again? What if God has already done His work of grace in your heart to cause you to hear and believe the gospel? If we would have strong faith, then, the most important thing we can do is hear the preaching and teaching of God's Word as often as we can. As the Word is preached in corporate worship, the Spirit generates faith in those who do not yet believe and strengthens the faith of those who are already saved. But God also calls people to faith and builds them up when God's Word is taught in other settings: at home, in the classroom, in Bible studies, in ordinary conversation, and elsewhere.

In order for a person to grow in sanctification, God must cause them to *continue* to hear and apply the word of Christ as well. Though we may hear and even understand the word of Christ, the gospel, without God applying it to our hearts, we remain disobedient and contrary to God. We need God to remind us of the message of the gospel over and over and to pierce our hearts again and again with the love, mercy, and grace of God displayed through the gospel. We need Him to turn our eyes to Christ always so that we can enjoy our God.

It is as we look to the person of Jesus that we are transformed more and more into the image of Christ, and we will grow in our obedience to Christ. We must hear and believe the Word of Christ.

Let's pray.