

This transcribed message has been lightly edited and formatted for the Web site. No attempt has been made, however, to alter the basic extemporaneous delivery style, or to produce a grammatically accurate, publication-ready manuscript.

Teaching: Carlon Tschetter
Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: Excuses

Transcribed Message
February 27, 2022
Romans 10:18-21

If you were here a couple weeks ago, one of the members of the pastoral staff made a rather bold and perhaps out of his lane prediction about winter being over. I think it is, if you've seen the forecast. It's going to be in the 70s this week. I don't know how you could refute that, but I was going to take up for him this morning and offer some excuses on his behalf. I was going to offer two or three, but then I read this. Our first president George Washington said: "It's better to offer no excuses than to offer a bad one." Benjamin Franklin said: "He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else." Then my favorite basketball coach of all time, John Wooden, said: "Never make excuses. Your friends don't need them and your foes won't believe them." So, I won't be making any excuses this morning.

And you ask what in the world does this have to do with the book of Romans? It actually has a lot to do with the book of Romans because we come to the section of Romans and the 10th chapter and verses 18 to 21 in which the apostle Paul is dealing with excuses. Excuses that have been made in light of the nation of Israel's general disbelief and acceptance of the gospel. Paul is grappling with this issue of how it is that as the gospel first came, the early church was primarily totally Jewish in nature. Now as the years have gone on, it is becoming increasingly evident that it is primarily the Gentiles who are responding to the gospel. That's what Paul is dealing with. In verses 18 to 21, he is going to take on some excuses that people have offered as to an explanation of why this would be so. As we look at these verses, we want to see that the gospel has to be heard. It has to be heard before it can be believed and the gospel has to be believed before it can save.

Before we do that, since we're coming to the end of the 10th chapter, I just wanted to take a few moments and offer some reflection on this ending of the 10th chapter. We've worked our way through chapter 9 and now we've worked our way

almost to chapter 10 and we have Chapter 11 to go in this very strategic set of chapters right here in the middle of the book of Romans. I begin by reminding you again that as we step into these chapters, we've really been looking at what we can call an antinomy. An antinomy is an apparent contradiction. We started off in chapter 9 and it was all about God's sovereignty and all about God's electing purposes. We grappled with those difficult verses of Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. We grappled with those verses that talked about the fact that before they were even born, God had made His choice and it would be Jacob that He would use within the line of His family. We grappled with the potter and the clay, with the clay being reminded don't be looking up at the potter and saying what are you doing? That was chapter 9.

Then we came to chapter 10. It's really been all about man's responsibility to believe. We've been rehearsing Paul's words in the 10th chapter that everyone who believes is saved. Anyone who believes is saved. Verse 13. Everybody. All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. And we come to the end of this chapter. We're like which is it? Is it election and God choosing in eternity past? Or is it man's responsibility and anyone who believes is saved? I think there are some inadequate solutions offered to this apparent antinomy. I want to put those before you in the form first of all of those who would misstate the doctrine of God's sovereignty. As we grapple with this tension, as is always the case in human nature, we tend to be pulled to one side or the other. There are those who misstate God's sovereignty, I believe, and they really bring forward the idea that God is just going to do what God is going to do irregardless of what I do or what you do. It doesn't matter. They end up teaching a determinism, which I don't believe the 9th chapter teaches. We remind ourselves again that election doesn't save anybody. Nobody has ever been saved simply because the Bible teaches the doctrine of election.

The other way I believe that we inadequately address this problem is to overemphasize man's free choice. As always is the case, the pendulum swings too far to one side and people in reaction to that swing back to the other side to try to counter what they believe is a misstatement of Scripture. In this particular presentation, when they overemphasize man's free choice, it's almost as if God is sitting up in heaven and He's waiting. He's anxious to see who is going to believe. We swing to the other side

and we make it seem as if God doesn't know, as if God is waiting on us to do something. He is waiting on us to move towards Him.

I think there's a better way. I think the better way is to open God's word to read it and to walk through it as best we can to accept what it teaches as hard as it might be. We grapple with it and as we do that it seems to me we end up teaching both – that God is sovereign and yes, man is responsible. That is where I come to as I read Romans 9 and when I read Romans 10. It just seems to me that that's exactly what Paul is doing. Someone has said everything happens under God's direction. That's chapter 9. Someone has said all choices are free acts for which we are responsible. That's chapter 10. That is an antinomy. We struggle to put those two together.

I would suggest then secondly the better way is we bow before this mystery. We bow before the mystery that is the sovereignty of God and man's responsibility before God. There many things in the Bible I don't understand. I don't understand the doctrine of the Trinity. I believe it. I accept it. The Bible teaches it. But I can't say that I can explain it very well. I don't have the capacity to explain and understand the hypostatic union of how it is that God could leave the glory of heaven, become a man, and be very God of very God and very man of very man. Who can explain that? But it's in the Bible. It's what the Bible teaches. We bow before the mystery. When Jesus cried out from the cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Who can explain the depth of what's going on in that heartfelt, gut-wrenching expression on the part of the Son of God towards His heavenly Father. It seems to me that there are many things in the Bible that when we come up against them we struggle to fully understand. I think God is fully aware of that. He has given us His Word. He understands our limitations. But He also says that it is required of us to walk by faith, for without faith it is impossible to please God. For those who come to Him must believe that He is and He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. So, we do that as best we can. We come to the end of this 10th chapter. And by the way, good news! We get to go all through this again in Chapter 11. It is coming again when we get into Chapter 11.

This morning though, Israel's failure to believe or what we do best – make excuses. Let's begin by reminding ourselves of the setting. The setting of these verses. Paul is bringing it all together here at the end of verses 18 to 21. He is summarizing

what he's been grappling with in this 10th chapter and it all centers around this matter of Jewish unbelief. When we read in verse 18 "But I ask, have they not heard?" The "they" is the "them" of verse 1. We're not going to go through all that again like we did last week, but the "they" is the "them" of verse 1. It's the Jewish people. It's the nation of Israel that is in view, and not all of them. Paul is going to start right off in the 11th chapter verse 1 and say I have believed and I'm Jewish. So, it's not all of them. He is writing to a church in Rome that is a mixed church made up of Jews and Gentiles.

It started off almost certainly as being primarily Jewish, then Gentiles were added in. Then the persecution came and the Jews were driven out of Jerusalem and so it became predominantly Gentile. Then the Jews began to come back in and now the church is mixed. He doesn't mean to say that but none of them have believed because he was one who had believed. But the majority had not. How do you explain that God's chosen people, the one through whom He has given all these blessings, all of these advantages, all of these privileges, by and large when they hear the gospel they do not believe? That's what Paul's been dealing with.

What was lacking? What was lacking, he pointed out in the 17th verse. We saw that last week. They had not believed. It's that simple. They had not believed. They had not truly listened to the word of Christ. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. They had not listened to the word about Christ that He truly is the Messiah. They had not listened to the word of Christ when He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Me". They hadn't listened to that either.

Once again it seems to me as you read these final verses, you can almost picture that we've got the antagonist again who's throwing out these excuses to Paul. We've seen that earlier remember as Paul interacted with those that were asking him questions and so he was setting up this dialogue. It looks like to me that's what he does here again. He offers a series of excuses. There are three of them. We're going to begin with the first one.

Maybe they had never heard. Excuse number one. Paul, maybe they never heard. Look at verse 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's response when he initially hears this first excuse, I think he would immediately say this

is the right question. This is good. This is the right question. You can't believe if you've never heard. You can't hear if there isn't a preacher, a proclaimer, an announcer. There is no proclaimer, preacher, announcer if they haven't been sent. He just kind of rehearses what he said in verses 14 through 17. I think initially when Paul hears this first excuse he is like yes, this is a good question. This is a good way to begin because he's going to come back now and say this excuse really isn't going to work because they have heard.

Look at Paul's reason as he rejects this first excuse. The end of that 18th verse: "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." Paul does something very interesting again here. He takes us back into the Old Testament. He loves to do that. We've seen that repeatedly in this section. He is constantly taking us back to the Old Testament. Here he takes us back to King David. He takes us back to King David in Psalm 19. In Psalm 19, which is a very familiar psalm to all of us, you know that the first half of the Psalm is all about the witness of creation. The heavens declare the glory of God and the earth shows forth His handiwork. The first half of the 19th Psalm is all about creation. It's all about the glory of God that is on display in nature. Then in the second half of the Psalm, it's really about the witness of the word of God. It is a wonderful description of what the word of God does in our life.

When you read verses 1 through 6 of Psalm 19, this is what you see. A picture, a wonderful picture, one of the best pictures of the Bible of what we call general revelation. General revelation. General revelation is called general revelation because it is general. That's right. It's general revelation because well, it's general. That's what you see when you read Psalm 19 and you look at those opening verses of that Psalm. Look at what he does in verse 1. There is a number of things that he does in this description. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims His handiwork." We have this very specific picture of God's handiwork. You notice in verse 2, it's a constant witness. "Day to day pours out speech and night to night reveals knowledge." Verse 3. It is inaudible. There is no speech. There are no words. "...whose voice is not heard." It's universal. The first part of verse 4. "Their voice goes out to all the earth." It's dramatic. The end of that 4th verse. "...and their words to the end of the world, and that He has had a tent for the sun." he goes through this rapidfire description by which he says

nature and creation have put on display for us a picture of God. Someone has rightly said in nature and creation, we bump into God every day. I love that. Everywhere we go, we're bumping into God. We're bumping into God. We may not see Him the way we should, but we're bumping into God because the witness is specific, constant, inaudible, universal, and dramatic.

The general revelation is also non-redemptive. Non-redemptive. That means it cannot save. General revelation cannot save. General revelation doesn't reveal the gospel. General revelation will tell you many things about God, but they will not tell you that God sent His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. General revelation doesn't do that. It cannot do that. It's non-redemptive.

What is Paul's point in doing this? I find it interesting. Why didn't Paul say oh no, they've heard. They've heard because I've told them. They've heard because I preached the gospel. Everywhere I've gone I've preached the gospel to my fellow Jews. He didn't say that. He says they know they have heard because of general revelation. What is he doing here? I think what he's doing is he's not trying to create a one-to-one comparison. I think what he is doing is he is drawing an illustration for us. He is drawing an illustration out of this matter of general revelation to speak to how the gospel has advanced.

Notice as he says that 18th verse: "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." He talks about their voice and their words like the voice of the preacher. He draws an illustration. Not a one-to-one comparison, because general revelation doesn't preach the gospel. That takes people. That takes a preacher. That takes the proclaimer. That takes an announcer as we saw last week. He's drawing an illustration and he said just as general revelation is sending a message out, so we as missionaries, all of us, we're taking a message. Where are we taking this message? We're taking it, he says, their words have gone to the ends of the world.

Now we have another little thing to deal with. What does Paul mean when he says that their words have gone to the ends of the world? Does he literally mean that the gospel has gone to the ends of the world of his time? Everywhere in the world, the entire globe of humanity has heard the gospel preached? He can't mean that. I don't

think he does mean that. I think what he's meaning in that phrase is the world of the Roman Empire. The world of the Roman Empire. Remember in Luke chapter 2 verse 1 when it says that Herod sent out a decree that all the world should be taxed. He didn't mean all the world, of all the people in South America or North America. No, he meant the world of the Roman Empire. When Paul begins in taking on this first excuse, he says no, they've heard. They've heard and not because I've preached it, and I have, but they've heard because this message has literally gone all through the Roman Empire.

How do we know that? We know that because the book of Romans was written probably in 57, in the late 50s. The day of Pentecost some 30 years before we had the launch of the church. In that setting, the gospel was preached by Peter. In Jerusalem that day, we had people from all over the Roman Empire Jews who came to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. They heard the gospel and many believed. Thousands believed. They all went back home. They took this gospel to the ends of the world, as Paul would say. We see a picture of that when Paul wrote to the church in Colossae. Listen to what he said in verse 6: "...which has come to you as indeed in the whole world. It is bearing fruit and increasing as it does also among you." He says the same thing in verse 23. The gospel as Paul steps back and sees what the Holy Spirit has done, He has taken the gospel to the world, that is the Roman Empire. All through this Roman Empire, the gospel has gone.

What's Paul's point? Paul's point. Excuse number one. Everywhere there are Jewish people in the Roman world of Paul's day, they've had an opportunity to be exposed in some way to the gospel because the gospel has gone out to the ends of the Roman Empire. In other words, they're accountable to God because they heard. Excuse number one? We never heard. We never heard the gospel. Paul says, Oh yes, it's gone to the ends of the Roman Empire. You're accountable.

Excuse number two. Maybe they heard but they didn't understand. maybe they heard that they didn't understand. Verse 19. "But I ask, did not Israel 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.' Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, 'I have been found by those who did not seek Me; and I have shown Myself to those who did not ask for Me'." I think again you start off with Paul's response. I think Paul might very well have said

something similar that he said to the first excuse. This is a good question. You can be exposed to the gospel and not understand. Those of you that came to Christ later in life, I think it would be fascinating for you to think for a moment how many times you heard the gospel before you believed. How many times did you hear the gospel before you understood it? Those of you that came to Christ later can probably begin to think back to different settings. Some of you maybe didn't hear it very much at all. We've shared this before, but there's that study that says the average person hears the gospel about 15 times before they believe, before they trust, before they truly step into what we would call understanding.

The gospel on the one hand is very simple. All have sinned. Sin brings death. Jesus came to die for sin. He rose again. If I believe that He did that for me on my behalf, I receive eternal life. It is real simple. That's why children respond to the gospel. They have the capacity to understand the gospel. But on another level, hearing it and understanding it and welcoming it is something else.

Paul's reason then secondly for rejecting this excuse again is going to take us back to the Old Testament. He's going to say if they didn't understand the gospel – watch this. This is a little bit challenging – why did they respond the way they did when all of these Gentiles begin to believe? That's what he gives by way of an account here. He does so by again going back to Deuteronomy and this time Deuteronomy 32 and verse 21 where we read: “They have been made jealous with what is no God. They have provoked Me to anger with their idols so I will make them jealous with those who are no people. I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.”

What's going on in Deuteronomy 32? We've been here before and we remember that in Deuteronomy, especially as we come to the end of this book, which is a great book to think of in light of Romans because Paul goes to it so often, you remember that Moses is giving the final challenge to God's people. They are about ready to go into the land. It's amazing how God lays out before them the path that is ahead of them. In this word of prophecy, God foretells of a coming time of discipline on His people. God laid it out very simply and said if you walk with Me in obedience, you are going to enjoy blessings untold. If you disobey me and you begin to follow after the pattern of the nations around you, life is going to become very hard and very difficult. That's what

Moses lays out for them here. He's really rehearsing for them their history that's about to unfold. What's coming is nothing less than a picture of God's discipline.

I find it interesting that when Paul says this in this 19th verse, “But I ask, did not Israel understand? First Moses says...” Present tense verb. Moses is still speaking. He could have said Moses said. It would've been perfectly all right, but I think that the point that he wants to make is Moses is still speaking. This truth is still relevant. “I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.” This is a picture of God's discipline of His people in their unbelief. Listen. In their unbelief, God is going to make them jealous of the Gentiles. In their unbelief, a part of God's judgment, God's discipline on His people is to stir up within them a spirit of jealousy towards Gentiles who are believing. The point that Paul is driving at here, why would Israel, if they didn't understand the glory of the gospel, if they didn't understand it was a replacement of a works-oriented salvation with the grace of God, why are they all upset with the Gentiles acceptance of this message? He's driving home this point that the Gentiles who are not a nation – he doesn't mean that there aren't nations/states. He means they're not a nation before God in the sense of being God's chosen nation, God's chosen people. They will understand and experience the blessing of God because they understand the message that is this gospel of grace.

In Isaiah 65 he does the same thing and he quotes again in Isaiah 65 and verse 1. Here he says: “I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for Me. I was ready to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, ‘Here I am! Here I am!’ to a nation that was not called by My name.” Again, the point is these Gentile people are responding to the gospel. They aren't God's chosen people but they're finding salvation in Jesus. It's as if God is giving Israel a picture of what's coming and saying to them I am going to literally stir up within you a spirit of jealousy in hopes that you will once again embrace Me as being the God of the covenant. Instead, they continue in their unbelief rather than humble themselves before God and repent. God had in fact told them that this very thing would happen. The second excuse? Not valid. The very fact that they're responding the way they are to the Gentile believers says that they understand fully that this is a matter of grace, but they won't let go of their self-righteousness.

Last excuse. Third one. Maybe God is against them. Maybe God is against them. Verse 21. "But of Israel He says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'" That is Isaiah 65 and verse 2. The amazing picture we have here is that of the mercy and patience of God. This is an amazing way to end this 10th chapter. I want to start by just flipping that verse and begin with the heart of man that he mentions at the end of that verse. There are two words to describe the heart of man. The first is disobedience. The first is disobedience. it simply means they refuse to believe. It's translated in other places as a refusal to believe. To disobey is to refuse to believe. That's why we have said repeatedly the gospel is a command. The gospel is extended as an invitation, but it has to be responded to. It demands a response. That's exactly what is pictured here. Their heart is disobedient. They refuse to believe. They will not let go of their works-oriented way of salvation and embrace the grace of God.

The second word is contrary, or we might say obstinate. It literally means to speak against. Do you find it curious at times that those who are self-professed atheists, who do not believe that there's a God, how often they're not content to simply not believe there's a God, but they want to convince you that your God doesn't exist? It is not enough that they don't believe in this God who doesn't exist. They want to disabuse you of any idea that you have a God who exists. That is really the idea of the "to speak against". They are disobedient and they are contrary. They're obstinate.

But then look at the heart of God in this verse. This is a great way to end the 10th chapter. It is a great way to begin thinking towards communion here in just a few minutes. Three things about God. He is persistent. But of Israel He says, I have held out my hands all day long. I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people. Persistent. All day long. all day long. We have that expression. How long am I going to wait? All day long? We know we're not going to wait for 24 hours. We're using an expression to speak of how long something is taking. The patience of God.

It is an expression of God's personal reach towards us. All day long I... God is the one who is pursuing. God is the initiator. God is the seeker. God is the one who sent His Son. God is the one who does this. He comes for us.

Then that last picture is of God holding out His hands. What comes to mind when you envision somebody holding out their hands? By the way, you think of this as going

on all day long. Have you ever tried to hold your hands out for like an hour and a half? It doesn't work. It's hard. But here I think is the imagery. Here is God. He's picturing Himself as holding out His hands all day long. It's got to be a picture of the generosity, the kindness, the mercy of God. I think in terms of just the life of our Lord and how often Jesus would use His hands in ministering to people, especially people who were considered untouchable. He would often instead of speaking to a leper He would reach out and touch the leper. Instead of speaking a word of a miracle, which He did, but oftentimes He would reach out and touch somebody. That is purposeful. That is God picturing His kindness, His generosity, His availability, His mercy to us.

Then we're right back where we started, my friends. Right back where we started. Is this condition of unbelief that is pictured in the nation of Israel, is this unbelief temporary or permanent? Come back next week to find out. We'll jump in to Chapter 11, Lord willing, next week.

What do we take away? God is our example. God is our example. Let's follow His lead. Let's be persistent, personal, kind, and generous in bringing the gospel to a lost world. Here is a picture that we need to mirror. That we would be this kind of people as we represent this wonder and grace of the gospel. If you're here this morning and you've never put your trust in Jesus as your personal savior, we want to invite you in these closing moments to recognize and to acknowledge that just as I have sinned, so have you. We have fallen short of the glory of God. We've failed God in many ways, many times. The Bible says there's nothing I can do to make up the deficiency of my righteousness to where it would ever come close to the 100% perfection that God requires. That's what God requires. He requires us to be perfect and none of us are perfect. So, there we are. In that condition we can either continue to try our best to achieve an unachievable goal, or we can say yes to that what Jesus did on the cross He did for you and He did for me. He did so that our sins could be forgiven and if I will believe that, if I will trust in that truth, God says He gives us eternal life.

Let's pray. Gracious Father, we pray again for the wonderful work of Your Spirit in each of our lives, compelling us to a greater Christ likeness, calling us to a greater reflection of who You are. Lord, that we would be as You are. That we would be a reflection of Your grace and of Your mercy. We pray, Father, for the receiving of this

wonderful gospel this morning by anyone who is listening. Holy Spirit of God, give understanding and give faith to those who would believe. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.