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**Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith**  
**Message: The Effective Call of God**

**Transcribed Message**  
**July 11, 2021**  
**Romans 8:30**

There is a brochure that I like to use in spiritual conversations with people, especially when I don't know where they are in their spiritual journey. It's not surprisingly called *Your Spiritual Journey*. In this brochure, there's a continuum and on the one far side there are those who are simply not interested. Maybe they even have a very negative view of Christianity and Christians. They're not interested at all. They're resistant even to talking about spiritual things. On the other far side are those who have committed. They're followers of Christ. They're growing in their relationship with God. So you have this continuum and in between of course there are other markers along the way. Those that are curious. Those that are searching. Those that have not yet believed but are moving in that direction. I read somewhere quite a number of years ago that the average person hears the gospel about 15 times before they believe. I have no idea the accuracy of that study, but here's what I do know.

On one hand, it's encouraging because it helps us to realize that sharing the gospel one time and not having it received is not the end of the story by any means. But I also know this and we see this in our lesson this morning. When God calls those whom He has chosen, they will not only hear but they will respond in faith and they will believe in Jesus as their Savior. That I do know because that's what the Bible teaches. This morning, we look at this matter that is the effective call of God. In this 30<sup>th</sup> verse of Romans chapter 8 I read it again: "And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified he also glorified."

Let's do a quick review. Just remind ourselves of where we are in this journey in Romans 8. We've been looking at what has been often called the Golden Chain. The Golden Chain. We noted a few weeks ago that there are five links in this chain. Those five links are listed for us in Romans 8. They begin with foreknowledge and predestination. We have spent the last three weeks looking at foreknowledge and

predestination. You can imagine how surprised and how encouraged I have been over these past few weeks that my inbox has been filling up with messages and texts from people who say: Carlon, thank you so much for teaching this truth. I understand it perfectly for the first time. I have no more questions. Or maybe that was a dream I had. That's not going to happen. We're not going to get to a place where we are going to perfectly understand the mind of God and the mysteries of God. We should be perfectly okay with that. We should understand that that is where God most likely wants us to be.

My actual goal as it is hopefully every Sunday is not to try to convince you of my view or somebody else's view, or some system over against another. My heart and my goal every week is to say to you: Be like Bereans. Just because I say it, don't believe it. You be like Bereans. You open your Bible. You read your Bible. You see what your Bible says and then we'll trust the Holy Spirit will make it abundantly clear. If we're asking God what is it that You're saying here, what is it that You're teaching here, I believe that He will make that truth known to us. So foreknowledge and election. It's okay to say I don't understand. It's also okay to say God is sovereign. Our God is in the heavens. He does whatever He pleases, the psalmist said. Within that framework I understand that He is good and He can't do anything that isn't good. I accept that and I embrace that and I trust Him with that. We have foreknowledge. We have predestination. We have calling. We have the fact that we're justified and then ultimately we're glorified.

What we have seen so far is this. We have seen that God is the one that's doing it. God is the one doing the work. This set of verses that we've been reading now regularly for a number of weeks has this personal pronoun "he". Just go through sometime and circle the personal pronoun "he". You're going to find there's nine of them. Nine of them in this set of verses. God is the one that's doing it and the "he" is referring to the Father. It is God the Father who is accomplishing and doing these things. It is His work.

What we have seen is that first of all what He is doing He does in an orderly way. He does these acts, these works in order. In other words, there is progression here. Every step leads to another step. Foreknowledge leads to predestination. Predestination leads to calling. Calling leads to justification. Justification leads to

glorification. It's one step after another after another. That's why it's obviously called the Golden Chain. They're linked together.

The second thing we've seen is they refer to the same people. You start off at the beginning of this description of what God is doing in the lives of people and I want you to see it's the same people at the beginning as it is at the end. Why is that important? Why does that matter? Obviously, there's a sense of continuity here. With that continuity, maybe more importantly, there's a message of security. Remember we've been talking earlier for many weeks that Romans 8 is in effect giving us a doctrine of suffering. One of the things that Paul is pressing in as he brings this chapter to a conclusion is that we would see within the context even of sufferings that there is great security. You need to understand that. We'll get into this more in weeks to come, but you need to be encouraged that your salvation is not depending on you. It is not depending on your puny efforts to hang on somehow to your faith. It depends on the One who has begun this good work in you who will see it through to the end. That's what we see here in this order and in the fact that He finishes what He starts. Nobody drops out on the way. Nobody leaves in this process. Everybody that is at the beginning is there at the end.

Lastly, we have noted that they cover the past, the present, and the future. The past, present, and future. The first two, foreknowledge and predestination, took place in eternity past before the world was even created. In the eternal councils of the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit come together and devise this amazing plan of salvation and redemption. All of that takes place in the past, in the distant past that we can't even grasp. But then when we come to calling, as we do this morning, all of a sudden, we step out of eternity past and we step into the present. We step into the present moment, the present time. We step into space, time, and history as we would say. Now we're living in the moment and this is applied to life.

Here's what I want you to hear. If you don't hear anything else this morning, I want you to remember what Paul says in Ephesians chapter 1 and verses 12 and 13. This is what he says at the end of this amazing statement in Ephesians 1: "...so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in Him,

were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit.” You hear that in this Ephesians passage. Paul talks about the fact that we were chosen in eternity past. He speaks of eternity, then he brings it into the present. He says yes, but never forget that your salvation journey in real time terms began when you believed. You were not saved when you were chosen by God. You are brought into the redemptive plan of God, but you are saved when, Paul says, you believed. It does require our response. This is not a mechanistic, deterministic, fatalistic program that God has put into place. We’ve already addressed that. This is our responding to that glorious gospel.

So let's look at this gracious call of God. That's what it is, my friends. The gracious call of God. We need to start off by saying first of all that there is more than one kind of call. There's more than one kind of call. The first one we're going to simply call the general call. It is a general call. It's kind of like common grace. Why do we call it common grace? Because it's common. Why do we call it a general call? Because it's general. Just like common grace is that the rain falls on the just and the unjust, the sun shines on the just and the unjust, so the general call of God goes out to everybody. That's why we reference it in this way. It goes to everyone. It is universal in nature. It is external in its call. I think you see that in Romans 1. We certainly see it in Psalm 19. The heavens declare the glory of God. Paul talks in Romans 1 about God making Himself known.

In that sense, this is the general call. Jesus, in His earthly ministry, was regularly giving what would fall into this first category of the general call. We referenced it a number of times. Matthew 11. Come. Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden. Anybody here weary and heavy laden? Jesus would say come to hundreds and thousands of people. Of course, there were weary and heavy laden because all of us are weary and heavy laden. But that was the general call. It went out to everybody. In John 7 chapter and verse 37 Jesus said if anyone is thirsty let him come. If anyone is thirsty let him come. One of my favorite expressions and words of Christ is in Matthew 23. Remember Matthew 23? This is at the end of Jesus's earthly ministry. The end of Jesus his earthly ministry. Remember He is looking out over Jerusalem and his heart is breaking. He says O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it. How often would I have gathered your children together as a

hen gathers her brood under her wings and you were not willing. See your house has left you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

I would say to you the general call of God goes out from this place every Sunday and more often than that. But every Sunday when we gather here, the gospel call goes out under this general expression that we're looking at here. We sang about it this morning. We sing about it regularly. It's the gospel. We sing it. We sing it back to God. That's the general call.

Someone this past week sent me a note and email. Very, very kind, but it saddened me. They said I have a sense that the gospel is being compromised at Covenant and I'm concerned about that. They mentioned a couple of things. I have to tell you, there isn't anything that would bother me more than the thought that the gospel is not front and center of everything we do all the time. I don't even want to do anything if the gospel isn't at the heart of it, isn't at the center of it, isn't defining us in this meeting place. When you go to your community groups. When our children are being ministered to, our students, our going out into the community. Your family. Parents, your greatest charge is to live with the gospel at the center of your home every day. That is your highest calling. I have failed desperately, the elders have failed desperately if the gospel doesn't remain at the center and heart of everything we do all the time. That's what we're talking about here. We are talking in the general call, this external call about simply the truth of the gospel.

Now here's the difficulty. The difficulty is left to ourselves we don't respond to the gospel. Left to ourselves we don't respond to the gospel. Last week I made the statement: the non-elect may come if they will. Some of you remember that very well. Different people heard a whole lot of different things than what I meant to say, what I mean by that. The non-elect may come if they will, but here's what I also said that some did not maybe quite hear. I said the non-elect may come if they will. They may come but they won't come because they won't want to come. The non-elect may come if they will. Just like Jesus in Matthew 23. Come, but I know your hearts are not willing to come.

Here is the problem. All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We're all at equal footing at the cross. There isn't anybody that is lower or higher. We're

all in the same place. No sinner has the inherent capacity to come in response to the gospel of their own initiative. It takes us right back to what the Bible describes as our spiritual condition in Romans. People hear the gospel. Listen. People hear the gospel, the external call, the general call. People hear the gospel across the world every day in all kinds of ways and venues. All kinds of people believe that God exists. Ask the average American. Go anywhere and do a poll. 90% of people are going to say I believe in God. You don't have any idea what they mean by that, but they believe in God. A high percentage of people for sure in our country believe in a man named Jesus. They know He was a historical figure. They may even know and they may even believe that He died on a cross. They may even be willing to concede, as I have said many times, as most people do I'm not perfect. I've sinned. Call it what you will, but I know I've messed up. You've got literally hundreds of millions, dare I say billions, of people within the Protestant Catholic framework of tradition who believe everything I just said. They believe there's a God, believe there's a Jesus, believe He died, believe they messed up.

But that doesn't constitute salvation. That doesn't mean that at the crunch time when it's I know you believe that stuff, but do you also believe that it is only through the death and resurrection of Christ that you can have eternal life? That God doesn't want your good works? That's offensive to people. We all want to think that we can bring something to God because we're not that bad of a person. We're certainly not as bad as that guy over there. When you put it in that way, even though they believe in God and Jesus and He died and they've messed up, when you put it before them that this is what you have to believe in, this alone you have to trust Christ and Christ alone for your salvation, they don't believe that. They turn from that. Paul says in Romans 3 that there isn't anybody who is seeking after God. There isn't anybody who understands. There isn't anybody who is going to fall into that category of being a searcher for the true gospel. They may be searching for something. 1 Corinthians 2:14 – the natural man, the natural woman does not receive the things of God. Does not receive the gospel. Neither can they know them because they are spiritually discerned.

So what does that say to us? What has to happen? What has to happen is the general call has to now become an effective call. The general call has gone out. I daresay if you have been at Covenant for very long that you ever heard the general call

of the gospel as many times as you've been here. That's the general call. The effective call is something different. The general call is general. The effective call is specific and it is personal. The general call is external. I hear it with my ears. The effective call is internal. Now we are talking about the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. The general call can be rejected. The effective call is always answered. The moment you put your trust in Christ alone, God's eternal plan of salvation broke into the present time in your life. Prior to that, God in eternity past tells us that those whom He has foreknown, that is that He has set His love relationship upon them, and He has predestined them to be like Christ.

Back in Romans chapter 1 verse 6, this is the way Paul began his letter to the Romans "...including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, to all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints." There's a calling, and not just a general calling, but there's an effective calling. Paul will say in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 9: "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." Ephesians chapter 4 verse 1: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." You see it all through Scripture. This effective calling that has brought us to faith in Christ.

How is it that this happens? The answer to that question is it happens by means of a divine summons. A divine summons. How many of you have ever been summoned to court? Summoned to jury duty? Did you know that in all the years of my life, which are not that many I might say, but in all the years of my life I have been summoned to jury duty one time. It was a federal case. I was pumped. I thought if I'm going to jump in to this jury duty thing I want to jump in big. It was a federal case. I have no idea what it was. Question number one. What is your occupation? I said I'm an ambassador. I am an ambassador for Jesus Christ. Oh, you're a pastor. We don't need you. go. I got bumped right off the bat. No, I didn't tell them I was an ambassador, but I thought that would've been an answer that might've gotten me in. maybe you've been summoned by the IRS. That isn't a good memory either. How many of you in your illustrious educational career have been summoned to the principal's office? I want to see a raising of hands. How many of you have been summoned? We're going to have an altar

call later. There's a lot of work to do here this morning. I have to say I was summoned one time too, so at least once.

Here's the question. When the call comes, why do I answer? When the divine summon comes, the call comes, why do I answer the call? Really the question is how and why do we come to Christ? If two people hear the gospel, why is it that one of them comes and one of them doesn't? I think there are four possible ways to answer that question. The first one is to say I came by myself. I heard the call and I came. That remember is our friend Pelagium from the 5<sup>th</sup> century and he didn't think there was any sin in our life. He didn't think that we needed God's grace. He said that if we needed salvation we could do it ourselves. I would check that one off as wrong.

The second one. I wanted to come and God helped me. I wanted to come and God helped me. That's kind of semi-Pelagium. Of course, when you look at that we're still dealing with the problem of Romans 3. There isn't anybody that's seeking after God. There isn't anybody that's searching. There isn't anybody that understands. We still have the problem. I wanted to come and God helped me. Really?

Thirdly, God gave me sufficient grace and I cooperated. God gave me sufficient grace and I cooperated. When I'm reading that I'm going okay, I can see some possibilities here, but we still have the question of what enables me to cooperate with God. How is it even in that third answer that I have in some way the capacity, the ability to cooperate with God when He's told me I'm dead in sin? Is there actually something in me that is a little flicker and it lights a little brighter at that moment? Is it a work apart from God?

I think the answer lies closer to number four. God in His grace moved me and made me willing to come. God in His grace moved me and made me willing to come. Back in John chapter 1 and verse 11: "He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Did you hear that? The 6<sup>th</sup> chapter and verse 43 again: "Jesus answered them, 'Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.'" You willingly come because God effectively calls. 1 John 4:19. We love Him. Why? Because He first loved us. You love

Him because He first loved you. We do so freely. We have free moral agency. We do so freely. We freely respond. Ephesians 1:13. Salvation breaks upon us at the point of belief. There's no sense of compulsion.

This is a part of the mystery. This is the part of saying God, I don't think I can wrap my head around this. But here's the point. nobody's going to say I wanted to come but You wouldn't let me. I wanted to come but there wasn't a call. The external call went out to everybody. The flipside of that is nobody's going to say I did not want to come but You made me come. That's not what the Bible teaches. If that's where we logically go again with our philosophical attempts to understand the sovereignty of God and human responsibility, then we got it wrong because that's not what the Bible teaches. We lay aside our logical syllogism and our philosophical attempts to solve this problem in our own head and we say God, I don't fully grasp it, but this is what You've said. I'm coming freely of my own volition and will, but You are also compelling me and calling me to come. I don't fully grasp how that works, but that's what the Bible teaches. God in His grace moves me and makes me willing to come.

Here's the question. Did my salvation began with self-movement toward God? Or did my salvation begin in a movement from God? Whichever answer you give to me in answering that question, this is what I know. Your prayers tell me what you truly believe. However you answer that question: did my salvation began with self-movement toward God, or in a movement from God? Whichever one of those you pick. I'm telling you right now I can listen in on your prayer life and I know which one of those answers you really believe, no matter what you said to me. I know which one you really believe.

Let me ask you this. Do you ever thank God for saving you? We better not go a day. Thank You, God, for saving me. Have you ever tagged on to the end of that statement and O God, I just want to thank myself too for believing as well. Of course not. We don't pray that way because we know that's not what happened. We don't on the one hand say God, thank You for saving me. And on the other hand, Carlton, you did such a wonderful job in believing. It was just beautiful. thank you. No, we don't say that. Do you ever pray for somebody in your family who doesn't yet know Christ? Do you ever pray for your neighbors who don't yet know Christ? A coworker? Friend? Of course, you do. Why do you do that? Because you know in your heart that salvation is

of the Lord. You know in your heart that it depends on God to open their heart. You invite a friend to come to church with you and you're praying God, whatever happens this morning. Please don't let Carlon say something goofy. But whatever happens this morning, open the heart of my friend to the gospel. That's what we pray, because in our heart, our theology I think is correct in that we understand God in His grace moves towards us before we move towards Him.

I want to show you in our last moments a lady who answered the call in that way. Acts 16. Acts 16 and we have this amazing story in Acts 16 that illustrates what I've been teaching. Just a little background. Paul and Silas are on their second missionary journey. If you're not familiar with the book of Acts, Paul went on three different missionary journeys and this is the second one. As he's traveling and connecting with churches that he has planted and as new believers are coming to faith, he and Silas believe that God is calling them to go to Asia, to go to an area where they have not yet been. They're planning in their mind to go to Asia. Before they can initiate this plan verse 7 unfolds this story about a vision that Paul has. The Holy Spirit, by means of this man from Macedonia as it is often called, tells Paul don't go to Asia. Go to Macedonia. Don't go east, young man. Young man, go west. That's exactly what happens. Paul and Silas go west. As they go west, they encounter an elect lady.

They encounter an elect lady. Beginning at verse 12: "...and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in the city some days. And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard of us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God." In my mind, just from a human perspective, you talk about anticlimactic. Paul is on this second missionary journey. There have been incredible ministry things going well. All kinds of things are happening that showed that God is at work. They are excited about launching in to Asia. God says no, wait a minute. Don't go to Asia. Stop your ministry right here and I want you to head west and I want you to go to Macedonia. They probably are thinking there must be some big stuff waiting for us in Macedonia.

God is breaking us off from here. He's got big stuff waiting for us. Let's go and see what God has.

What do they encounter but a little prayer gathering of the women's auxiliary here by the river. I'm not trying to diminish the women's auxiliary, but here they are. There's this little gathering of women. It's kind of interesting. There are no men. There aren't any men there praying. I'll just leave that laying there. The women had gathered to pray, but the men aren't there. Look what God does through Paul. Paul, don't go preach the gospel in Asia. Paul obeys and he goes to Europe to Philippi. Who does he meet but a woman from Asia. From Thyatira. Lydia is a woman from Asia, the place that Paul wanted to go.

Two things. The common grace of God is clearly evident here. It's like the external call, like a general call. Lydia is a worshiper of God. We read she is a worshiper of God. That means she's a Gentile, but she's converted to Judaism. She is not yet a follower of Christ, just like Cornelius in Acts 10. He was a Gentile who was converted to Judaism, but he had not yet heard the gospel. That's who Lydia is. On that spiritual continuum that we started off with, she would have been someone who is in that seeker sensitive category, if you will, with openness to hearing more and learning more about God and his ways. But he had not yet believed in Christ.

The call of God to salvation though is what I want us to be centering in on. The call of God to salvation. This is the effective call. This is the effective call. The Holy Spirit is at work. We read verse 14: "One who heard us." Heard us. She was listening. "One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul." Look at that. The Holy Spirit is at work. The Holy Spirit is at work in Lydia's heart giving her understanding, compelling her, if you will, to listen. What does it say? And the Lord opened her heart. That needs to be underscored. It does not say that she opened her heart. The Holy Spirit could have worded this in a way that just simply said she opened her heart to the gospel and believed. He didn't say that. He said the Lord opened her heart. It doesn't say she cooperated with God and she believed. Scripture doesn't say that. It doesn't say Paul opened her heart, made an incredible presentation of the gospel, and Paul opened her heart. No, it says the Lord opened her

heart. I think that statement where it describes her as paying attention is really just a synonym for moving her from being just a seeker to a believer. It is a synonym for the fact that she has experienced now the miracle of new birth. She is now a Christ follower.

Look at this. What is the biblical way to express your faith? What is the biblical way to express your faith? In other words, what do people do in response to the gospel? How are we supposed to respond to the gospel? I would suggest to you in many American church traditions and, unfortunately in my opinion, we've exported this to the world, but the most common response to the proclaimed gospel in most, some, many American churches is the altar call. Please hear me. I'm not saying anything about your salvation experience if it was related to an altar call. I think again whether it's Romans 8 or whether it's this specific issue, we need to be pressing into the Scriptures and saying why do we believe that? Why do we do that? Is that in the Bible? Can you show me where that is? Christendom didn't know anything about an altar call until the beginning of the 1900s with a man named Charles Finney. The reformers didn't know anything about an altar call. Charles Spurgeon knew about an altar call and he said that he'd prefer not to do that.

What is the Biblical response to the giving of the gospel? How is it that people are to respond to this gospel? Here's my heart in this. I want to be absolutely certain and clear in the presentation of the gospel so that people know what it is that brings them salvation. I want to be absolutely clear about what it is that the gospel does in your life when you hear it and encounter it and enter into it. You see, it's not the preacher who is persuasive in his words, clever in his presentation who wins people to Christ. It's not some mood being set. It is not singing a song or two for however many times we need to sing it. What is it that compels people to believe? We need to have a strong confidence in the Word of God, in the gospel of His grace, and in the Holy Spirit of God.

I can't tell you how many times I've had conversations with people over all of my years at Covenant in which because there has not been an altar call they have often said something like this: Hey, I really enjoyed the morning. It was a great morning but there was one thing missing. And I can just fill in the blank for them every time. It was an altar call that was missing. One guy even said after a particular Sunday morning:

You had them. Why didn't you offer a call? I said I did offer a call. It's the gospel. I trust the Holy Spirit of God and the gospel to work in people's hearts.

Now what did Lydia do when she heard the gospel? She did what I think Biblically we're supposed to do. She got baptized. She got baptized. That's what we read. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what Paul said and after she was baptized. What do you do in response to believing and encountering the gospel and receiving it and welcoming it in your life is you are baptized. The other possibility is you invite the preacher out for dinner. Well, that's what the text says. I'm not making that up. It says that she urged us to come to her house and stay for a while. So, I mean, I guess that's another possibility but we'll leave that one for later.

Here's the point. we share the gospel. God opens the heart, and then in obedience to what has been believed and received, be baptized. Yes, this is a commercial because next Sunday we're doing a baptism. If you've believed, or even if you believe this morning, I would love to baptize you or have somebody baptize you next Sunday. That's what we do in response to the gospel. We believe and are baptized. We share the gospel. God opens the heart.

What do we take away? The offer of salvation goes out to everyone. That's the general call of God. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. We understand that as bad news and good news. The bad news is all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. The bad news is sin brings death and separation from God. The good news is Jesus came and lived a perfect life and died on the cross in my place for my sins. All I have to do is believe that that's enough. Let go of my works and believe and trust that what Jesus did was all that needed to be done. And then, God gives to me and to you the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Father God, how grateful we are for this glorious gospel. How grateful we are for this life-changing gospel. How grateful we are Father God, Lord Jesus, and Holy Spirit for this work that You do in our lives by Your power for Your glory in bringing us to understanding this life changing truth. Father, I pray right now that anyone who is listening, anyone who is watching by livestream, anyone who is here in this room, Father, that Your Spirit would open their eyes and give them understanding of who

Jesus is, what He has done, and all that they need to do is believe on the Lord Jesus Christ to experience new life, forever life. Thank You. In Jesus's name, amen.