

Becoming the Means of Answered Prayer

Romans 10:1-15

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We have had a wonderful day thinking about prayer and praying. It was good to be with the folks over there this afternoon, engaged in carrying before the Lord the burdens of our hearts. And most of the requests that I had in my hand and that Patricia had in her's, had to do with people who are concerned about the salvation of someone else. And they were a lot like the prayer of Daniel, praying for the restoration of His people, for God's mercy and compassion and lovingkindness and forgiveness. In fact, that was the predominant request that I saw. And I was reminded also that even in the prayer room when many folks came this morning after the two services, the burden on many hearts, people seeking prayer was for friends, family, relative, a spouse, children who are outside the Kingdom of God.

This should preoccupy us in our prayers. We are constantly to be lifting up holy hands and praying because God our Savior will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, Paul says. This should be a priority burden in our prayer life. And as we prepare for the Lord's table, I want to begin with that very issue.

Turn in your Bible to Romans 10. They told me I didn't need to preach tonight, but I never need to preach, I just have to preach. You understand that. This will be a meditation. But it's in my heart. Romans chapter 10 provides for us, I think, a wonderful transition from a day of prayer into the world that awaits us as the dawn introduces us to a new day tomorrow. Paul says in verse 1, "Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them...that is for Israel...is for their salvation." This was the great ache in his heart, like all the servants of God, all those who had lined up with God's purposes, very much like Ezra, very much like Daniel. His prayer to God was for the salvation of Israel.

He acknowledges in verse 2 that there's a problem. "I bear them witness. They have a zeal for God but not in accordance with knowledge." He was burdened for Israel, he was so profoundly burdened for them that back in chapter 9 he says, "I have great sorrow...verse 2...and unceasing grief in my heart, I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for the sake of my brethren." This was so all-consuming, this burden, this prayer, that Paul in his great sorrow, unceasing grief would almost have wished his own damnation if it could somehow mean the salvation of his people. His heart was occupied with this prayer incessantly, praying for the salvation of his people. The problem was that while they had a zeal for God, while they had some motivation toward God, it was not according to knowledge. And no matter how he prayed, that prayer would never be answered until they understood what they needed to understand. And he says, "Here's the problem with their knowledge, or lack thereof," verse 2, "they have zeal but not according to knowledge." And what is it they don't know? Verse 3, "Not knowing about God's righteousness.

First of all, they didn't understand the righteousness of God. They didn't understand the absolute perfection of God, therefore they didn't understand the holiness of God, therefore they didn't

understand the standard which God, by virtue is of His holiness, had held high. They did not know how righteous God was. They thought God was less righteous than He was, than He is.

In order to be saved, one must know the righteousness of God. One must understand that God is absolutely holy, cannot look upon iniquity and sin with any degree of tolerance, must punish it all. They didn't know that. They thought God was less righteous than He was, than He is. And furthermore, they went about seeking to establish their own. Therefore, not only did they not have a good theology proper, they didn't have a good doctrine of hamartiology, a good doctrine of anthropology, they thought God was less holy than He is, they thought they were more holy than they were. So they thought that they could meet God's standard on their own terms, establishing their own righteousness by works and ceremony and ritual.

Furthermore, it says in verse 3, "They did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God." The righteousness of God was revealed in the Law of God. They were unable to subject themselves perfectly to that Law. Instead of feeling the weight and the guilt and the burden of that inability, they concocted schemes by which in attaining some degree of adherence to the Law superficially, they could satisfy themselves. They had lowered God. They had elevated themselves and diminished the intent of his revealed Law. Beyond that, in verse 4, they didn't understand Christ. They didn't understand the Messiah. They missed the whole character of the Messiah looking for a political military social leader, they missed the one who came to confront their ignorance about God's righteousness, to confront their wretched sinfulness and inability to attain righteousness on their own. He came to confront their incessant violations of God's Law. And more than that, they didn't know that Christ is the end of the Law. They didn't understand that He came to bring an end to the tyranny of the Law over them. By bearing in full the punishment of the Law He then ended the domain of the Law. They didn't understand that. They didn't understand who He is. They didn't understand why He came. They hated Him for confronting their sin. They missed the whole intent of His death. As an end to the tyranny of the Law over all who believe for He bore in His own body our sins on the cross and took the full weight of God's wrath as we sung so beautifully in those songs tonight. They didn't understand that Christ being the end of the Law provided righteousness, that His perfect righteousness is imputed to the one who believes. And at the end of verse 4, it is by faith that all this happens, it's for everyone who believes. They missed it all. They didn't understand the righteousness, the holiness, the perfection of God. They didn't understand the horrific nature of their own depravity and sinfulness and inability to do anything to please God. They were not able to submit themselves to the righteousness of God revealed in the Law. They didn't know that Christ came to end the tyranny of the Law by being a sacrifice for sin that satisfied the Law. They didn't understand that through Christ came imputed righteousness to the believing sinner and they didn't understand that it was all by faith. They should have understood it. Verse 5, Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness based on Law shall live by that righteousness. They should have known because Moses said if you're going to endeavor to be saved by the Law, you have to keep it all. And if you violate it anywhere, you're cursed. They should have known that it was by faith.

They should have known that it came by faith. They should have known, verse 8, says the Word of faith which we're preaching, that if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed." And they should have known that it was the same for any who believe, whether he's a Jew or a Gentile. "He is the same Lord...in verse 12...of all abounding in riches, for all who call upon Him, for whoever will call upon the name of the

Lord will be saved.”

I mean, they didn't understand everything you need to understand. They didn't know God was as righteous as He is. They didn't know they were as sinful as they are. They didn't subject themselves to the righteousness of God revealed in His Law. They didn't understand Christ. They didn't understand who He was. They didn't understand why He came to be the substitute that took our place, to receive the wrath of God and the just deserts of the violation of the Law. They didn't understand that through Him comes righteousness imputed to the one who believes, that it's all by faith. And it's faith exercised by anyone, Jew or Gentile, without respect of persons. And that no one putting their trust in Christ is disappointed.

It all came down to whether they would confess with their mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that God had raised Him from the dead, thus vindicating His work on the cross. And by that, being saved. So, Paul has a problem. His burden is that the people of Israel would be saved. That's His prayer. That's his heart's desire. But he can talk to God about that all the time and that prayer will not be answered until they have the proper knowledge. And that's when we come to verse 14 why he says this, “How then shall they call upon Him in whom they haven't believed?” They can't call until they believe. And how are they going to believe in Him whom they have not heard? And that is to say, until they have heard the truth about Christ, they can't believe. And how will they hear without a...what?...preacher? And how shall they preach unless they're sent?

This is not talking about the church sending, this is talking about the great commission. This is talking about God sending us forth. You can pray and pray and pray for the salvation of the lost, but nobody is ever saved unless they confess Jesus as Lord, having believed that He is and believe in their heart that God has raised Him from the dead as a confirmation of His sufficient work on the cross on their behalf. You can't be saved unless you believe that. You can't believe it until you hear it. You can't hear it till somebody tells it to you. And nobody will tell it to you till they're sent to you. So, as we pray and we've been praying, and you've been praying, and you do it all the time for the salvation of the lost, we have to understand that we are also the means by which God answers that prayer. That's why we're told to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every person.

And then in verse 15 he borrows from the beautiful language of Isaiah, just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things.” It's true. Those whom God sends to bring the message that is heard and believed, they are beautiful a feet. That's sort of a Hebrew way of saying how wonderful is their arrival.

I was in Denver for a pastors conference and I...I was standing in the lobby and just getting ready to go in to the conference, this was a few weeks ago, and a man came running across the lobby at me and threw his arms around me. And I didn't know if he had a knife or what. He was kind of a different looking guy and he kissed me on the cheek. And I only kiss men in Russia because I have to. And he had tears in his eyes and he...I never met him...and he went on to tell me how God had used the radio ministry and tapes to bring him into the Kingdom and make him into an evangelist, which he now is. And when the meeting was over, we went to the same scene. Two hours later, same thing...embraced. He handed me a little note and thanked me. I understand that. I...I have the privilege of meeting people like that. And I've told you that. And it is a great joy. And you know that as well when you witness. You become the means by which the prayer is answered. And so, we think about the responsibility to pray and we pray repeatedly, we pray again and again for the lost. But the question is, do we ever become part of the answer by being faithful to proclaim the message

of the gospel?

Verse 17 sums up our thoughts. "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word concerning Christ." So as we come out of day of prayer and we look forward to what is ahead of us, what it should be is a time for us to be the means by which God can answer our own prayers for the lost.

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