

The Means God Uses to Bring People to Salvation

Romans 10:14-21

Romans 10:14-21 - *“How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “LORD, who has believed our report?” ¹⁷ So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

¹⁸ But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: “Their sound has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the ends of the world.” ¹⁹ But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: “I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.” ²⁰ But Isaiah is very bold and says: “I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.” ²¹ But to Israel he says: “All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”

Background Notes

In the second half of Romans 10 the apostle Paul continued to stress the responsibility of people to respond in faith to the message of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. In Romans 9, we have the “divine side” of our salvation, and in Romans 10 we have the “human side” of our salvation. The “human side” is that we must respond in faith to the gospel of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. Religious sincerity is not enough -- there must be **faith in Christ’s saving work on the cross**.

If ever there were a case where religious sincerity would have been enough, it would have been the case of Israel. Look back at verse 2: *“For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”* Notice, they didn’t have a zeal for Hinduism, or a zeal for Buddhism – they had a zeal for **God** – the **God of the Bible**. In fact, they made a sincere effort to follow the Law of God! But their efforts didn’t “make it” with God. Why? Because their zeal was not according to knowledge -- they were ignorant of the magnitude of God’s righteousness! They failed to respond in humble faith. They failed to realize that they couldn’t “make it” with a perfect, holy and righteous God by their religious deeds, so they lost out on the righteousness of faith -- which was readily available.

This is true of many people today – they are sincere, but they are sincerely mistaken. Some are even zealous to do the right thing, but they fail to make it with God because, in their pride, they think that they can “make it” with God on their own. They fail to respond in faith to the message of God’s grace in Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9 is so appropriate here: *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.”*

I recently spent some time with a man who became a Christian as we talked. He prayed a very basic prayer, but it was a prayer of faith; he responded to the message of God's grace and received Christ. What a contrast to the majority of Jewish people that we read of here in Romans 10. Even to this present time, they don't see the **simple way of faith**. The Jewish people continue to try to impress God with their religious efforts. They are religiously zealous and sincere, but they're wrong, and according to the Bible, they are lost. What a contrast to the simple, humble, prayer of faith in Christ that this new friend of mine made over a cup of coffee, after about an hour of conversation.

Doctrinal Points

1. The gospel must be preached before it can be believed.

In verses 14-15 we have five links in the chain of evangelism. *"How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are sent?"*

Do you see the five links there? Let's start with verse 15 and move from cause to effect for each of the links.

Link #1: The preacher is sent with a message. Who's the preacher? Every one of us – not just the gifted evangelists! The Lord Himself sends us, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel"* (Mark 16:15).

Link #2: The preacher preaches the message. What is the message? The message is the good news, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Again the great commission, *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mark 16:15). Let's preach the whole message -- let's not preach a watered down gospel. Let's not preach a social gospel! You know what the social gospel does, right? Ultimately, the social gospel just makes a person more comfortable on their road to hell. Yes, we are to help meet social needs, but we need to preach the message of the gospel.

Link #3: The unbeliever hears the message. We need to communicate in terms that people can understand. We don't just pass out pamphlets and run away. We don't use "religious jargon" that doesn't communicate! Recently one of my students asked me what the word "Messianic" meant. Well, if a Bible college student asks a question like that, you can appreciate how careful we must be to communicate the message to the unbeliever in terms they can understand!

Link #4: The unbeliever believes the message, and that belief must be more than mental assent. Here's an example of this concept. A chain smoker may believe (mental assent) that smoking is bad for him and that it will lead to his death. But if he doesn't stop smoking -- if he doesn't commit himself to this belief -- he'll suffer the fatal consequences. There must be a **commitment of his life to what he believes with his head**. There must be more than mental assent to the gospel message.

Link #5: The unbeliever calls on the Lord. If the belief moves from the head to the heart, there will be a calling out in faith to the Lord. This is true commitment! This is the response of true faith to the message of God's grace, and it results in

salvation. As verse 13 says, *“whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”* The gospel must be preached before it can be believed.

2. The gospel must be believed before it can save.

We just went over that point in one of the links of evangelism, but in verses 16-21 the apostle Paul showed that this is the link that Israel missed. The emphasis in these verses is definitely on Israel, on the Jewish people.

The links of evangelism that we looked at in verses 14-15 apply universally (as we saw in verses 12-13), but in verses 16-21 Paul again concentrated on the Jews. Everything necessary for Israel to respond in faith to God's grace was readily available, but they wouldn't believe.

Preachers were certainly sent by God with a message -- just think of the many prophets of the Old Testament! The people certainly heard the message: *“But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world” (v18).* Here the apostle Paul quoted Psalm 19:4, which speaks of the revelation of God in creation. Israel had that message --as does everyone else.

But Israel had more -- they had the special revelation of God, the Scriptures, but still they did not believe. Verse 16 says, *“But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’”* What's the obvious answer there? Very few believed the message!

So Israel certainly had the message preached to them, and they certainly heard it -- but they did not “hear it with the ears of faith.” Faith must follow hearing the Word for salvation to take place. Verse 17: *“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*

In verses 19-20 Paul quoted two more Scriptures from the Old Testament to show that not only did Israel hear the message, but they understood it as well. It's clear, in these Scriptures from Deuteronomy and Isaiah, that the Gentiles would be brought into God's favor and that they would come to know the true God through the true Messiah. Here's Paul's argument: *“But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says, ‘I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation.’* The Jewish people had to admit that many Gentiles were now worshiping the God of the Jews, and the Jews didn't like it, as Deuteronomy 32 (quoted here) predicted. Now verse 20: *But Isaiah is very bold and says: ‘I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.’* The Jewish people further had to admit that the Gentiles had now found the God of the Jews, in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that Paul quoted here. They **found Him through Jesus**. The Jewish people could not deny this.

So Israel **had** the message and **heard** the message and **understood** the message that the Messiah was Jesus -- but they wouldn't respond in faith. Verse 21: *“But to Israel he says: ‘All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people.’* What a statement of the long-suffering patience and love of God! It brings to our minds

the outstretched hands of our Lord Jesus on the cross, doesn't it? But Israel would not believe by faith what they **knew** to be **true**. Sadly, this is true of many people today as well. The gospel must be believed before it can save.

Practical Application

How beautiful are your feet?

I'm not asking you if you have nice looking feet! I'm referring to verse 15: "*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!*" This is a quote from Isaiah 52. There, in context, it refers to the people who would bring the good news to the Jews of their return from captivity. Here Paul applied this verse to the feet of those who preach the good news of **salvation in Christ -- true release from the captivity of sin!**

Do you have "beautiful feet"? Are you sharing the good news? I challenge you, and I challenge myself to share the gospel with one non-Christian this coming week. Will you do that? Will you take up that challenge? How beautiful are your feet?