

Righteousness Based on Faith

Romans 10:5–13

I'm sure many of you are familiar with Michael Bloomberg. If you are not, he is the founder and CEO of a global company. He's probably best known as a three-term mayor of New York City. He has been involved in all kinds of philanthropy efforts all around the world in such areas as public health, arts and culture, the environment and education. Over the years he has given more than 3.3 billion to all sorts of causes and organizations. In 2014, Queen Elizabeth named him an honorary Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire for his "prodigious entrepreneurial and philanthropic endeavors." You get the point. He's out there trying to do a lot of good.

Well, on April 15, 2014, the New York Times ran an article about Bloomberg. The article was about his involvement in trying to curb gun violence. At the very end of that article the author wrote this:

When he sat down for the interview, it was a few days before his 50th college reunion. His mortality has started dawning on him, at 72. And he admitted he was a bit taken aback by how many of his former classmates had been appearing in the "in memoriam" pages of his school newsletter.

But if he senses that he may not have as much time left as he would like, he has little doubt about what would await him at a Judgment Day. Pointing to his work on gun safety, obesity and smoking cessation, he said with a grin: "I am telling you if there is a God, when I get to heaven I'm not stopping to be interviewed. I am heading straight in. I have earned my place in heaven. It's not even close."

http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/16/us/bloomberg-plans-a-50-million-challenge-to-the-nra.html?_r=0

Last week we saw how Paul described the Jews of his day. They had zeal for God, but not according to knowledge and so they missed the salvation that God offered. They sought to establish their own righteousness through their works (Rom. 10:2-3). In a sense they were thinking, "I have earned my place in heaven." They were confident of their standing with God, like Bloomberg sounds confident of his standing. But one's standing with God and what is going to happen on Judgment Day is not determined by what anyone thinks or by the intensity of one's zeal, it will be determined by God.

As we think about our standing with God; as we think about what's going to happen to us on "that day," what matters is what God says. And what God says is that it is the righteous who will stand before God. It is the righteous who will inherit eternal life. And as we will see in the passage that we are looking at today, Paul says that this righteousness is not earned, it is righteousness based on faith.

Today, we are looking at Romans 10:5-13, a passage in which Paul turns to the Scriptures to demonstrate that righteousness or salvation is by faith not works. In the last verse we looked at last week, Paul made the statement that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (v. 4). And so Paul goes on now to demon-

strate from Scripture the truth of this point. He starts in verse 5 by quoting Leviticus 18:5:

⁵ *For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness.*

In the original context, Moses wrote that if Israel would do what the law commanded, they would continue to enjoy life in the land of promise. But if they disobeyed they would be cut off from the land and would not continue to enjoy life in the land. And so when Leviticus 18:5 says, *shall live by that righteousness*, it is not speaking about eternal life; it was speaking about life in the covenant community. One would continue to experience that life based on obedience to the law.

And so Paul uses this verse to summarize the essence of the law – that blessings were contingent on obedience. He uses this verse to articulate the kind of righteousness that his fellow Jews were seeking. They were seeking a righteousness *based on law*. In other words, based on their works. But as he said in 10:4, Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Now, as we come to verses 6-8 Paul quotes from Deuteronomy. Whereas the passage in Leviticus was used to summarize an approach of seeking to establish a righteousness based on the law, Paul now uses Deuteronomy 30 to emphasize a righteousness based on faith. He writes:

⁶ *But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: “DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, ‘WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?’ (that is, to bring Christ down),⁷ or ‘WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).”*

In verse 5 he said *Moses writes*, but here, even though Moses also wrote Deuteronomy, he says that *righteousness based on faith speaks*. Probably he does this because Moses would have been associated with life under the law. But now he is using Deuteronomy to talk about what God has now done through Christ.

And so what does *righteousness based on faith* say? The first phrase, *Do not say in your heart*, is from Deuteronomy 9:4. In that passage God warns Israel that when He leads them into the land and gives them victory over their enemies, they are not to claim that God did this thing because of their righteousness. They are not to say such a thing in their heart.

Then he quotes from Deuteronomy 30:11-14, which is a passage that in its original context was intended to communicate that the commandment of God was not too hard. But here in Romans, Paul uses this passage and applies it to Christ. My understanding is that Paul understands this passage in Deuteronomy to be communicating a principle of grace. Even under the old epoch of life under the law, God, as an expression of His grace, established a relationship with His people and He brought His word near to them

that they might know His will and obey it. And so Paul takes that principle of grace that he sees in Deuteronomy 30 that applied to how God worked then among Israel and he applies it to what God has now done for both Jews and Gentiles through Christ.

And so Paul pulls out phrases from Deuteronomy 30 and then adds interpretive comments to apply these phrases to Christ. He says, *Who will ascend into heaven?* And his interpretive comment is, *that is, to bring Christ down.* And then to the phrase, *Who will descend into the Abyss,* he adds the interpretive comment, *that is, to bring Christ up from the dead.* The way I understand it is that he is saying that there is no need to bring Christ down to earth, because He has already come. And there is no need to bring Him up from the dead, because he has already been resurrected. As an expression of His grace, God already has sent Jesus into the world to die and be resurrected. And so don't say in your heart that these things need to happen.

But what does this righteousness by faith say? Verse 8:

⁸ *But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching,*

In Deuteronomy, *the word* [that was] *near*, referred to the law, but here as Paul uses this passage he says that the word is *the word of faith* that they were preaching. It was the message about faith in Jesus. This message, Paul says is near.

Now as we come to verse 9, the word in the original language that connects verse 9 to verse 8 can be translated either as, *that*, or as, *because*. If it is translated, *that*, verse 9 would then be giving the content of what is believed. But if it is translated, *because*, then verse 9 would be explaining how it is that the word is near. I think Paul is explaining how the word is near. The word, or the gospel, is near because all it requires is a response of faith and when that happens salvation occurs. Look at verse 9:

⁹ *that [or because] if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;*

Paul picks up the terms, *mouth*, and, *heart*, from the Deuteronomy passage and uses them to talk about how the word comes near. He says that there is a condition for salvation and that condition is a response of faith.

Here's how he explains this response of faith. First, he says that one must confess with his mouth *Jesus as Lord*. This confession was one of the first creedal confessions of the church. It was often used as part of the rite of baptism. What is in view here is not a confession of making Jesus the Lord of one's life, but rather a declaration of what is objectively true about Him. He is Lord. He is the One who reigns and rules over all. And it was an expression of alliance to Christ.

Paul also says that a response of faith requires that one believe in his heart that God raised Jesus from the dead. *Heart* refers to the very core of a person. Saving faith is not

just about intellectual assent to some facts about Jesus; it is a whole-person commitment and yielding to him. It is a belief in one's heart that God raised Jesus from the dead. When Paul says we must have a belief that God *raised* [Jesus] *from the dead*, he has in view both the death and resurrection of Christ, which was the core gospel.

Paul is talking here about one essential condition for salvation and that is faith. To confess with one's mouth and to believe with one's heart refer to the same thing – a response of faith. And when a person expresses this kind of faith, Paul says salvation is experienced. Verse 10:

¹⁰ *for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.*

Again, Paul is talking about one event here. He is not saying that you believe with your heart and you get righteousness and then the next step is to confess with your mouth and you get salvation. There is one act of believing and out of that expression of faith one is given *righteousness* and *salvation*. When one believes, he is made righteous before God. And when one believes he is given *salvation*. He is transferred from death to life; from abiding under God's wrath, to being a vessel of mercy. This salvation is a gift that is appropriated by faith and only by faith.

Now, in the next three verses, Paul emphasizes that this offer of salvation by faith is available to everyone. In verse 11, Paul quotes Isaiah 28:16.

¹¹ *For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."*

This refers to not being *disappointed* (or put to shame) at the end of time. *Whoever believes* will experience salvation at the end of time.

Back in 9:33 when Paul cites this passage, he says, *he who believes*. But here, he says *whoever believes*. He broadens out the application of Isaiah 28 to emphasize that this salvation is for everyone. This connects back to what he said in 10:4 that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to *everyone who believes*. And to drive home the point that it is for everyone he writes in verse 12:

¹² *For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; ¹³ for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."*

Paul says that *there is no distinction between Jew and Greek* regarding how salvation is experienced. The only other time he uses this expression in Romans was back in 3:22. There he said that there is no distinction regarding sin. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Here he is saying that when it comes to how one experiences salvation and is made righteous, there is no distinction. Both *Jew and Greek* finds spiritual life from the same Lord. It is found by calling upon him in faith.

And for the one who calls on Jesus, he says that Jesus is *abounding in riches*. Paul repeatedly uses this term, *riches*, to refer to the wealth of God's grace and mercy that He lavishes upon those who believe (Rom 2:4; 9:23; Eph. 1:7; 2:7). God is not stingy with His grace and mercy, but rather He lavishes them upon all who believe.

Verse 13 is from Joel 2:23, which highlights two things that Paul is stressing. First, it stresses the need to express faith. It is the one who *will call upon the name of the Lord* [who] *will be saved*. Secondly, it highlights again is the universality of the offer. It is for *whoever will call*. Jew and Gentile alike can and need to call upon Jesus for salvation.

And so the Jews of Paul's day might have said it, Michael Bloomberg did say it, and we at times might think it as well that somehow we need to earn our standing of righteousness, but Paul absolutely rejects such thinking because the message of the gospel is this – righteousness is based on faith.

In the rest of our time, I want to make three simple statements that come out of the passage that we've looked at today. These are statements that summarize what Paul is teaching here and help us think rightly about righteousness and salvation.

First, **God's offer of righteousness/salvation is for everyone**. Repeatedly, Paul says it is for whoever will believe. It is for all. It was for the Jews who had been striving to live good lives. It was for the Gentiles who were maybe coming out of idolatry or all kinds of sinful practices. It didn't matter. The offer was for everyone - both Jews and Gentiles without distinction.

You may be someone who has been a religious person, you've lived a clean life, you have been trying to do right, God's offer of righteousness through Christ is for you. Or maybe you've lived the exact opposite kind of life. You've been involved in all kinds of activities of which you are ashamed. You know you've been living far from God. God's offer is for you as well. God's offer of righteousness is for everyone.

Here's the second statement: **Obtaining righteousness/salvation requires a response of faith**. Paul says that everyone who calls on that name of the Lord will be saved. But you DO have to call on Jesus to save you. He has done everything necessary to make your salvation possible. He lived a perfect life; by his death and resurrection he made it possible for your sin to be forgiven and for you to be given new life. But to appropriate what Jesus did for you requires that you respond in faith – you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead and you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord.

Attending church won't give you this. Living a good, moral life won't. Just simply knowing things about the Bible and God and Jesus won't. You have to believe. Obtaining righteousness requires a response of faith.

Here's the final statement: **When you believe, you are lavished with the riches of God's mercy and grace.** All your sins are forgiven; not just some – past, present and future forgiven. When you believe, you become what Romans 9:23 describes as a *vessel of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory*. God is not stingy with His mercy and grace. He lavishes us with the riches of these things when we believe.

For most of us here today, these statements are reminders of truths that we've experienced. And we are grateful for God's mercy and grace in our lives. We are grateful for our salvation. But for others, you have not yet experienced the truth of what I'm talking about. You have not yet trusted Christ and experienced this righteousness that is based on faith. If I'm talking about you, I have a question for you: Is there any reason why you wouldn't want to trust Christ today?

Right where you sit, in the depths of your heart you can call out to Jesus this morning to be saved. I want to say a prayer that you can pray silently in your heart to God to express such faith. It's not the exact words of a prayer that matters; what matters is faith in what Jesus has done for you. If you'd like to trust Jesus right now, I would invite you to pray with me in the silence of your heart:

Lord Jesus, I confess that I need you. I have sinned against you in my thoughts and deeds, by things I've done and by things I've not done. Jesus, I believe that you died on the cross to pay for my sin. Please forgive me. I believe that you were raised from the dead to give me new life. I trust you alone to make me righteous before God. Thank you God for saving me. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer with genuine faith, you can know that God did exactly what you trusted Him to do. He forgave all your sin. And Christ came into your life and has given you spiritual life and a standing of righteousness before God. And you can be confident of your standing with God, not because you've earned your place in heaven, like Bloomberg said, but because of the gift of God's grace and mercy that has saved you.

Amen.