

***Our Role(s) in Others' Faith***  
***Romans 10:14-21***

Think about the people you know who need to experience the life that only Jesus can provide. I'd actually like for you to think of specific individuals who need Christ (as opposed to humanity in general). Think about family members, the people you live with (in your apartment, your dorm, fraternity or sorority), the people you work with (the ones you like and the ones you don't), your neighbors (the guy across the street, the family two doors down). Perhaps you're thinking, "I'm that person. . . I've heard the name Jesus but I don't really understand what He has to do with my life."

Every single day you and I rub shoulders with people who need Christ. Do you ever wonder, "What is God's plan for leading those people to Christ?" Does God even have a plan for helping people come into a relationship with Himself through Jesus?

It turns out that the answer is "yes." In today's passage, Romans 10:14-21, Paul lays out a very clear, logical pattern of what needs to happen for people to come to faith in Christ. He describes a very simple, obvious progression. I doubt that many (if any) of us would disagree with what he says. The challenge for us is to "own" and to love our roles in this progression/pattern.

***A Simple Progression: Sending, Preaching, Hearing, Believing.*** (*Romans 10:14-21*)  
To set the context, let me remind you what Paul wrote in verse 13 (which we studied last week):

13 for "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

The emphasis is upon the universal availability of salvation. "**Whoever** will call on the name of the Lord will be saved." Regardless of social status or ethnicity, everyone who believes in Jesus and cries out to God for mercy will be saved. Having established that a personal response of "calling on the name of the Lord" is essential for salvation, Paul now explains how people come to this place of faith.

Verses 14 through 21 describe these conditions as a progression that was true in ancient Israel under the old covenant and that is true today under the new covenant in Christ's blood. In verses 14 and 15 Paul asks four rhetorical questions that reveal this progression.

14 How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? 15 How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!"

We see here a logical progression that must take place if people are to call upon the Lord. First, preachers need to be sent. We tend to think of preaching as something that happens exclusively on Sunday mornings in gatherings such as this one. But the term preacher simply means "herald" - someone who shows up and announces or proclaims

a message. In Paul's day the Roman emperor would send a preacher/messenger to announce the birth of an heir. This was good news that needed to be proclaimed.

The NT uses this term preacher to refer to someone who announces the good news about Jesus: Jesus is the King who came to establish His Kingdom. First, preachers need to be sent.

**Second**, they need to announce/proclaim/share the message about Jesus: He lived a sinless life and then died as our substitute. He was the spotless Lamb sacrificed for our sins. He was raised bodily from the dead on the third day; this was "God's great amen!" - God's endorsement of His life and death. The good news is that everyone who believes this is saved: they are forgiven and given life and wholeness and a relationship with God.

Paul had a strong sense that he had been sent and commissioned by Jesus Himself to take this message to the Gentiles (Romans 1:4-5). This term "preacher" would include missionaries who are sent to other lands with the gospel. But there is also the sense in which every believer is commissioned as a messenger of this good news. Every one of us has the privilege of "bearing witness" - giving a firsthand account of what God has done in our lives through Jesus.

**Third**, people **hear** the gospel. They hear and understand who Jesus is and what He has done on their behalf. **Fourth**, people **believe** in Jesus. They come to this place of confidence and trust that Jesus actually paid for their sins and that He offers, "**calling upon** Him," crying out to Him for salvation.

At the end of verse 15 Paul quotes from Isaiah 52:7, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!" The "good news" announced in Isaiah's day was that the exile in Babylon was over; the people would be restored to the Land and to temple worship. Whereas most feet are dirty and scarred and ugly because of years of wear and tear, the feet that bring messengers to announce such good news were "beautiful."

If the feet of messengers in Isaiah's day were beautiful, how much more beautiful are the feet of those who bring the gospel - the good news about Jesus. The message of the gospel is that our Exile **from God** is over. Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus we no longer have to live in a distant land, estranged from God. Instead of being separated from Him because of our sin, we have come home; we experience God as a good heavenly Father; we now stand before God without shame; in Christ we are as alive to God as Jesus Himself.

None of us would have this right standing before God if He hadn't sent messengers with the good news. We wouldn't have heard and believed and called on the name of the Lord for salvation. This is the normal, God-ordained way that people come to the place of believing in Jesus and experiencing salvation. If you're a Christian, you believe because you've heard about Jesus from your parents or a friend or a speaker or someone who wrote a book. This is Plan A. There is no Plan B.

As we've discussed in past weeks, in Romans 9-11 Paul is wrestling with the fact that relatively few Jews in his day believed in Jesus. Beginning in verse 16 Paul puts the Jews' unbelief in the context of this progression he has described. In verse 16 Paul quotes from Isaiah 53:1 to reinforce that the disobedience and unbelief in the first century mirrored the disobedience and unbelief in Isaiah's day.

16 However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?"

The answer in Isaiah's day and in Paul's day was "not many"; only a small remnant would be saved. In verse 17 Paul gives a foundational truth that informs everything he has said so far:

17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

If we don't believe what Paul is saying in this verse, we won't accept our role in the process of people coming to faith in Christ. Paul says that "faith comes from hearing." Faith is stimulated within a person's life when s/he hears the gospel - which he calls "the word of Christ" - the good news about what God has done through Jesus Christ. This is why we talk about our faith with our family and friends - because the gospel will produce faith within some who "hear" the truth about Christ; something deep within their souls is stirred and they believe.

In verses 18 through 21 Paul answers a series of possible objections to his thesis that so few of his fellow Jews had become followers of Christ due to their own unbelief. Notice the first objection in verse 18:

18 But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have;  
"Their voice has gone out into all the earth,  
And their words to the ends of the world."

Maybe the problem was that Israel simply hadn't heard the message; perhaps God hadn't sent preachers and therefore they haven't heard the word of Christ that stimulates faith. "Indeed/to the contrary," Paul writes, "they **have** [heard]." Paul quotes from Psalm 19 when he writes that "their voice has gone out into all the earth." Interestingly, this is the psalm which speaks of how "The heavens are telling of the glory of God" (Psalm 19:1). The Psalmist makes the point that day after day the sun, moon and stars declare throughout the entire earth how glorious God really is.

In the same way, Paul implies, the gospel (the word of Christ) had "gone out into the earth" in his day. It's not that every single person had heard; but the message had gone forth. The book of Acts records how the gospel spread from Jerusalem all the way to Rome. History tells us that the gospel kept moving outward across land and sea. God was faithful to send people to share the message. People had heard.

In verse 19 Paul raises the possibility that perhaps people had heard but they didn't really understand the message.

19 But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? First Moses says,  
"I will make you jealous by that which is not a nation,  
By a nation without understanding will I anger you."

This is a quotation from Deuteronomy 32:21. In that context, since the people had made God jealous by worshiping other gods, God tells the children of Israel that He is going to make **them** jealous by the way He shows preference to another nation. It wasn't going to be a nation that superior understanding of who He was; God would punish them "by a nation without understanding" - by a nation that was largely ignorant about the God of Israel. This happened repeatedly in Israel's history. When, for example, they were in exile in Babylon, they looked around at the prosperity of the Babylonians and realized everything they had lost. God wanted them to become jealous and turn back to Him.

Paul quotes this Scripture as a way of saying that in his day Israel's lack of understanding was due to their own rebellion against God. In chapter 11 he will develop more fully the idea that God was making Israel jealous once again. In verse 20 and 21 Paul quotes from Isaiah 65:1-2. Verse 20 is a reference to God's pursuit of the Gentiles (non-Jewish peoples):

20 And Isaiah is very bold and says,  
"I was found by those who did not seek Me,  
I became manifest to those who did not ask for Me."

This is a point Paul had already made in Romans 9:30-31. Even though the Gentiles weren't actively seeking to know God, He sent His one and only Son to die for their sins, and then He sent messengers to tell them what He had done. Most of us here in this room are the recipients of this grace; God pursued us even though we weren't pursuing Him. In verse 21 the quotation from Isaiah 65:2 refers to God's pursuit of the Jewish people:

21 But as for Israel He says, "All the day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

Instead of crossing his arms in apathy or clenching his fists in anger, God stretched out His hands, inviting His people to draw near and experience His care. He sent them prophets and priests and other spiritual leaders who invited them to draw near. The sad fact, however, was that they were "a disobedient and obstinate people"; they didn't really want what He was offering them.

Paul acknowledges that many who hear the message about Christ want nothing to do with Him. Given who I am and what I believe that makes no sense to me. I can't imagine why anybody would reject the life and healing and wholeness that Christ offers. But in Isaiah's day, in Paul's day, and in our day, many will hear this message about Christ and

reject it. Instead of becoming disheartened by that reality, we need to understand and accept and love our role in leading others to Christ; then we leave the results to God.

Let's think for a few minutes about ***Our roles in this progression.***

Here at Faith we have an ongoing, corporate commitment to this basic progression. We are committed to ***sending*** people. Over the years we have sent people to share the message of Christ in different places around the world. Here in our own community, we support people who have been sent/commissioned in various ways - campus ministries, outreach to international students, etc. Our Love Manhattan initiative allows us to partner with agencies and organizations that are meeting pressing needs in our city. If you get involved in this effort you will in essence be sent to represent Christ in those ways.

We also believe that our work provides an opportunity for us to represent Christ. We do this primarily by doing good work. As Dorothy Sayers wrote, "Christian work is good work done well." As we do our work for God, we develop relationships and we gain respect; in this context we often have the opportunity to tell others about Christ.

Of course this is the next step in the process. We have the privilege and the responsibility to ***share our faith*** with others. We tell our own story, and we explain how others can also trust Christ. We do this individually, and we do this corporately. We don't expect you to be a one-person church; together we are the body of Christ. This is why we run the Alpha course 3x a year: so that you will have a place to bring your friends who need to hear about Christ. Of course, we also encourage you to invite friends to worship on Sunday morning. We talk about Jesus every single week.

As we share the gospel, God stimulates faith in the lives of some who hear. You and I have a vital role to play in this process. In order to give you a tangible example of how God uses people like you and me to share Christ with others, I've asked a friend to come and share his story. This is Scotty Holm, a senior in marketing.

NOTE: To hear Scotty's testimony click on the audio podcast.