

A Better Covenant
Romans 10:1-13

Jeremiah 31:31-40

Hebrews 8

Responsive Psalm 139:1-10

Turn with me this morning over to Romans chapter 10. In this chapter we will see that Paul has sort of shifted his focus a bit, but it really isn't a new subject it is a continuation of his explanation of faith and belief. As we saw in chapter 9, God has chosen for himself a people but it is not the nation of Israel, but rather the spiritual nation of Israel, a people of promise, from all nations who have been given the spirit so that they may see, understand, and believe upon Christ. And likewise God has raised up some so that he may show his wrath, revealing to his chosen children the mercy and grace he has given. This reality has caused a great deal of pain for Paul, as he starts out in chapter 9, that he himself wished he could be accursed from Christ for the sake of his countrymen, Israel. And we see this sentiment continued again in the first verse of chapter 10, "Brethren, my hearts desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved."

As we know, many Jews have come to believe, the reality that Christ is the messiah had been revealed to them and they believed. But as we can see here in Paul's written, many also have not, and instead rejected the message of Christ, being blind not having the faith to see and believe, as Paul wrote in in verse 31 of chapter 9. "But Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at the stumbling stone As it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and a rock of offense, and whoever believes on him shall not be put to shame." Israels unbelief and rejection of Christ was an intentional design by God, for he is the one who reveals, he is the one who grants the faith that they were lacking, and he is the one who laid that stumbling block, so that his purpose might stand. Giving an eternal example, that despite every advantage one can have in this world, without faith no one can see the kingdom of heaven.

There seems to be an innate part of us to strive and pursue to better ourselves, for Israel it was a striving after the law, seeking righteousness through physical actions, but all of those so called improvements, or attempts at being better, seeking righteousness through the law is superficial and meaningless before God. There are some who God had revealed this too, who spoke of this reality, David understood as he wrote in Psalm 51:14. His prayerful cry out to God after the prophet Nathan confronted him on his sin with Bathsheba. "Deliver my from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise. For you do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; you do not delight in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite hearts- these oh God, you will not despise." Conviction, and a realization of our standing before God, a heart broken in repentance, helplessly longing to be forgiven, to be reconciled is the sacrifice that God seeks. Not a ritualistic sacrifice of an animal, or even some empty recital of prayer, but a broken heart who sees and knows its own rebellion against God which comes seeking forgiveness.

Likewise Hosea the prophet wrote the word of the Lord saying, "For I desire mercy and not sacrifice. And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." (Hosea 6:6) God does not desire ritual and tradition, but a personal, meaningful relationship with his people. We are to know him intimately, and personally as our God.

This is something that Israel didn't understand, believing that the ordinances that God set forth was the point, when the point was God seeks obedience and worship, a broken repentant heart, the sacrifices were a reminder of the awfulness of sin, that blood must be shed to cover it, yet the blood of bulls, and sheep never accomplished the forgiveness of sin, but rather pointed to mankind's need of the Messiah, one who came offering himself, once and for all. Israel did not have the faith to believe, and were so caught up in the signs and ordinances that they were blind to the realities. Last week we talked about some really basic biblical interpretation principles, and the one that I tend to practice is a simple reading and understanding of God's word. But the caveat to that, is that it must be a spirit lead reading and understanding because without the spirit one can not see, nor understand the meaning behind the accounts, for it is spiritually discerned. This is Paul's prayer here in chapter 10, that their eyes would be open and faith would be granted so that they may come to see the beautiful reality of Christ. Let us go ahead and read our passage this morning, starting in verse 1.

We see in Paul's lament here that he is arguing that the Jews, though having a zeal for God have been in reality stubborn and disobedient, for they refused to submit to the only righteousness that God can accept, which is the righteousness only found in the one whom they rejected, Jesus Christ. They took pride in being a people of God, resting upon the old revelations and established traditions which actually hindered them from discovering what the true message of God was all about. The Jews had already considered themselves saved and in a right relationship with God, because of the exodus out of Egypt and the inheritance of the promised land. But we know, through the revelation of the Spirit and the teachings of Christ and his disciples and apostles that the exodus out of Egypt into that promised land is a picture, a metaphor for the believers pilgrimage on this earth. As we wander in the wilderness, as the old song says, traveling through this world of woe. Looking forward to the true promised land, which is in the very presence of our Lord and Savior. Paul made it clear in chapter 9, that by holding on to history, Israel rejected the reality of which their historical experience points to.

As one commentary author put it. “ Just as a wedding ceremony is prepared for by the means of a rehearsal so that all in the bridal party can know their parts in the event, so the exodus was a rehearsal for what God was to do for his people in the death of his son.” The tragedy is that Israel confused the rehearsal with the real event, they concentrated on the fact that they had been freed from the slavery of Egypt when the reality is they had not been freed from the slavery of sin, the redemption of sin is what the rehearsal was all about. So Paul prays as he is burdened with this reality, that these people with such a zeal for God, do not know God, that these people given every single privilege in revelation and prophesy do not see its true meaning and purpose. Paul had ever reason, humanly speaking to turn his back on them, the leaders in Israel sought to silence him, slandered him, threw him in jail, and made attempts on his life, yet through it all he had a love and concern that they to could know the height and depth of God's love and mercy which was displayed before them on the cross.

Paul has a unique understanding of both the Jews zeal for God, and the love and grace found in Christ. For he too was at one time one of them, a Pharisee of Pharisee's as he called himself, hunting down and persecuting all those who followed Christ. But now, he has been changed by God and he understands that zeal, but is broken over it for it is a zeal on empty belief for they have rejected the substance of God's message. Verse 3, “Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.” The Jews were not ignorant of God's righteousness, they understood that it was reflected and seen through the law, but they saw the law as a way to attain it for themselves and they refused to accept the righteousness that God provided.

Before God called him, Paul could not have accepted that God's righteousness was made through the sacrifice of one at the hands of the gentiles. But Paul is living proof of the power of God to change the hearts of man, he was a rejector of Christ, and a persecutor of his people, but God by his grace came to Paul and showed him his error. AT one time Paul thought that he was pleasing God by silencing all who he believed were dangerous heretics, but instead of pleasing God he was fighting against him. Having experienced this change first hand, from unbelief to belief he had hope that God would save a remnant of his countrymen. So much so, it was the practice of Paul to preach first to the Jews as he would go to the synagogue of each new town he would visit. And then upon their rejection, he would turn to the Gentiles. So he had this experience time and time again, of the rejection of his own people, yet, he would be embraced by those seen as lesser.

The death of Jesus by the hands of the Romans was the stumbling block that the Jews could not get over. In their mind, what could be greater then the revelation that was given to them already? Of God saving his people from Egypt and bringing them to Sinai, where he revealed himself in glory and majesty. What could be greater than the messages of the prophets of deliverance from exile in Babylon? Well we all know, it is the death and resurrection of the Son of God for redemption, this revelation is what changed Paul from a destroyer to a proclaimer of the gospel of Christ. The Jews continue to deny Christ as the messiah for this very reason, believing the Messiah to be a conqueror who would come and establish them as great among the nations, not seeing that is exactly what God accomplished through Christ on the cross, he has called for himself a great nation from all people, and he has not conquered kings, but rather has conquered the greatest enemy of man, sin and death itself.

Rejecting the cross, seeing it as foolishness, they continued to rest upon their own righteousness found by keeping the law, which actually did not give righteousness, but rather held them captive to darkness, for as Christ pointed out on the sermon on the mount, no man can truly keep the law, for though he may have the outward appearance of law keeping, inside his heart is full of hatred and rebellion, and it is the heart at which God looks, and it is the motives and intentions of the heart of which God judges, therefore as Paul says in verse 4, "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone." Paul's statement here would terrify a devout Jew, for the law is an essential part of the established covenant. In Jewish thinking, no law meant no covenant therefore the end of the law would mean the end of the unique relationship that God had with Israel. And I think that this is the point that Paul is making here and it is the main thrust of his argument.

No longer is God's revelation specific to Israel, but now through Christ is available to all who believe. In Roman's 8 Paul wrote, "who is he who condemns? It is Christ who has died, more then that, who was raise to life and is at the right hand of God and now intercedes for on our behalf." No longer does the priest need to enter the temple offering sacrifices for the people year after year, for Christ has by his own blood made atonement for his people and now sits at the right hand of God the Father. As the author of Hebrews wrote in chapter 7, "If perfection were through the Levitical priesthood, for under it the people received the law, what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law." Christ truly is the end of the law, for he is the high priest of a new and better covenant, one that is not sealed by the blood of lambs and bulls, but by the blood of the son of God. A better covenant, based on better promises, leading his people to a better promised land.

The following set of verses are a bit harder to understand as Paul seemingly is comparing the old covenant law, with the new covenant faith. But I don't think that is what Paul is doing here, or at least in the traditional understanding of a comparison between the 2. Verse 5, "For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, The man who does those things shall live by them. But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, Do not say in your heart, who will ascend into heaven? That is to bring Christ down from above, or who will descend into the abyss ? That is to bring Christ up from the dead. 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 preach." When the old covenant law was given, Moses ascended up mount Sinai where it was given to him, written on tablets of stone, and he descended back down bringing the law, and this revelation to the people to Israel. In the context of what Paul is saying here I think that he is speaking of the mode and method of delivery of the new covenant. Where as Moses had to go up and retrieve it, the law of Christ as it where, that is, the new birth, faith, belief and the ministry of the spirit are near, it is in our hearts, and in our mouth. We read it this morning in Jeremiah, "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah- not according to the covenant I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. NO more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, know the lord, for they all shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them says the lord. For I will forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more."

Now look how Paul concludes verse 9, "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Christ is the fulfillment of the prophesy of Jeremiah, the day has come where God has established a new covenant in the blood of his own Son, the promised Messiah, the one who has come to free his people...not from Roman tyranny, but from their sins, not freed to be reestablished as powerful nation within the world, but to be a power nation of priests throughout all the world, believing and confessing the love of God. We do not need to ascend into heaven to find him, nor the depths of death, for Christ arose from the dead, ascended into heaven, but left us the helper, that is the spirit which confesses of his grace and mercy. He is never far from us, and we do not need to go chasing after him, for he has come to us, he has sought after us and brought us near to him.

In the context of this chapter, I believe that this is the point that Paul is making, that Christ is the end of the law, for he has come and established that promised new covenant mentioned by Jeremiah. IF we think of the ancient times of Israel, in the entire world, only Israel had the revelation of God, others did not know God, they were pagans and worshiped nature, or god's of their own design. A part of the ministry of the ordinances, the law, the traditions that God gave Israel was to set them apart and show the world that their God, is God. No one knew of God, except by the revelation that was given, and that revelation was given to individuals, and to Israel. But now, all know, and all are aware of God. No longer do we need to teach our neighbors and our brothers that God exists, for his word has been given not just to one people as in the past, but is readily available to the world.

At one time, Israel were the keepers of the word of God, but now it has gone out into the world so that all who come to him may believe. Verse 11, "For the scripture says, who ever believes on him will not be put to shame For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call on him. For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Paul is giving a gospel message to the people in Rome who he is writing, as we know from the first part of chapter 9, and of chapter 10, it is his hearts desire that his countrymen according to the flesh, that is the Israelite would come to believe as he has. To no longer look to bring Christ down, still awaiting the promised Messiah, but to know and believe and understand that he has already descended, and has not further ascended and is seated at the right hand of the father, having accomplished his works, fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law, and established a nation of people under grace, through faith, by his mercy. And like Paul, this too is our message, and is the message of all believers, to confess with our mouths the hope of the one who lives in our hearts. We do not need to go seeking after God in the high and lofty places, nor look for Christ among the dead, for he is near, indwelling and living within us, and Christ has arisen, and in like manner we shall one day follow. Therefore the call goes out, Repent, and believe upon the one who has given of himself so that we may know the father. For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord, and believes in their heart, shall be saved, shall be forgiven, shall be reconciled and called the children of the most high God, the inheritors of promise, whose hope and substance is not in this world, but in God and God alone.