

God's Chosen People
Romans 10:14-21

1 Corinthians 1:1-17

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Responsive Psalm 19:1-11

This morning we are going to continue in Romans chapter 10, picking up where we left off last week. As we read this passage this morning we shall see that Paul here begins to ask a bunch of rhetorical questions, more than likely anticipating the conversation over some of the statements that he had made previously. He has just spent a large section of his letter to the believers in Rome explaining, and lamenting the fact that his own people, his countrymen by the flesh have rejected Christ, a reality that is a point of deep sorrow for Paul. Seeing a zeal for God, but it is a zeal that lacks faith and understanding leaving them empty and without redemption from their sins, this is the point Paul makes in verse 2 and 3, "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness have not submitted to the righteousness of God."

Forsaking the substance for the shadow. The best example I can think of this, is imagine someone is cooking a delicious meal, you can see them working in the kitchen preparing each and every part, you can see them put some of it together, you begin to smell the aroma of it as it is being prepared, it smells so amazing and appetizing, you can't wait to partake in what has been prepared. You sit down at the table in anticipation for this glorious meal that you have been waiting for, the cook brings forth the food and sets it before you....but it is a dish you despise, there is no way that the delicious smell you have been experiencing, leading to anticipation of an amazing meal can be this. So, you reject it...this can't be it. That is essentially what Israel did with Christ. They had a sense of the Messiah, a great anticipation, They were given a sense of who he would be, as they got glimpses of God's work as he revealed it to them piece by piece. But in the final reveal, in the arrival of the promised Messiah, he was not what they had thought, he was not this warrior king, he was not a conqueror who had come to subdue their enemies and free them from the tyranny of Rome. There is no way that this poor carpenter's son, who surrounds himself with fishermen and tax collectors can be the long awaiting and promised Messiah. So they hated him, they despised him, he was an impostor, impersonator...there is no way that this man was the one whom they were anticipating.

But as the authors of the new testament prove over and over again, he was indeed the Son of God, who was sent to bring reconciliation to man by the offering of his own life. He truly was the substance of the shadows....to keep with the metaphor, he prepared meal that Israel could smell was being prepared. But when he arrived and stood before them, he was despised and rejected for there is no way that this man could be the son of God. They were blinded, unable to see, and this very one whom they rejected was the very one whom God gave to build his nation of believers, a people of promise, a nation of priests who would have direct access to God, not through a constant practice of ritual and sacrifice, but through the one and true sacrifice that was sent, who accomplished this promised reconciliation, this promised redemption, once and for all.

Again keeping with the food metaphor, the chef has brought out this much anticipated dish, and serves it to everyone, many become angry at the chef believing a deception, that he has lied, but some having faith in the chef taste the food and find that it is indeed exactly what they have been smelling and anticipating and they begin to tell the doubters, the ones complaining and angry to try it, for it is indeed incredibly good. And some try, and some agree and now see and understand that the food set before them is indeed what they could smell and anticipated. but many reject what is set before them, and begin to even lash out in anger toward the chef and those who have now eaten.

So to it is the same with salvation, unless one has the faith to believe, they can not truly see God, they may even have a knowledge and understanding of God, as Israel did, even a zeal for God, but they will not fully taste and experience God and his mercy unless they have been given the faith to believe, and unless they come to know Christ as the one who gave himself for them so they may see God. The fact of the matter is, and the point that Paul makes in chapter 9, is that unless God reveals this reality to you, you can not, and you will not believe. And this is by his design, for his purpose, for even the unbelief of people, those who reject and despise God, even those who deny his very existence are set and used for God's purpose. The sovereign reign and control of the one who has created all things is inescapable and inevitable. Think upon the reality of what Paul says in verse 17 of chapter 8, "For the scripture says to Pharaoh, For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show my power in you, and that my name may be declared among all the earth." God raised up Pharaoh for his purpose, a ruler who had enslaved Israel, and even though hearing the word of God through Moses, even though seeing first hand the power of God through the signs of the plagues, and the death of the first born children throughout his kingdom, he rejected and hardened his heart....so the purpose of God may stand. For he said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom ever I will have compassion, therefore he has mercy on whom he wills, and whom he wills, he hardens."

An inescapable reality, yet the point here isn't that God has set some aside for judgment, to show his power and his wrath, but that God would show mercy and save any. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, there is none righteous, no, not one. By our very nature, we are children of wrath, a fallen people, lost in our sins. But God is rich in mercy and grace so that he shows compassion on whom he wills, not by any merit they have gained but purely of his own pleasure and will, so that they may see and know him. And we, as his children do not know who these others are that he may be calling out of this sinful mass of humanity, so it is given to us to teach, and the preach, to make known the riches of his mercy so that others may hear and believe. It is not for us to judge or to know who is worthy, who God will call but we are to be like the farmer who indiscriminately sowed seeds into the field, and some fell on good ground and grew, and other seeds fell on bad ground and died..but that was little concern to the farmer, as it is little concern to us believers sharing the gospel for it is God who prepares the ground for the word to take root. We get an example of this in Paul's ministry, time and time again he goes into the synagogues, and time and time again they reject his teaching, and they reject him, yet he goes faithfully believing that God is not only able, but willing to save some.

Which brings us to our passage this morning, the last half of chapter 10 in which Paul is talking about this very thing, the ministry of the gospel which is the hope of a dying, sinful world. I don't want to just jump right in where we left off last week though, because this last half is a conclusion of a thought that Paul is writing, so I want to take a moment this morning and just take this chapter here as a whole, so starting in verse 1 to get a full picture of what Paul is saying here. (read 10:1-21) Paul begins to teach a biblical reality by asking a series of rhetorical questions, as is often his way to draw his readers into a truth he is about to lay out. In this passage he quotes a lot from the old testament, pointing his readers to see how important this message of salvation they have been given truly is. Again he shows not only the importance of the gospel message itself, but through the use of old testament scripture shows that this was always the intended purpose of God, that through the word of the gospel of Christ, that many from all nations and peoples would be saved.

In his commentary Tom Holland points out a parallel that Paul is making here between the new covenant believers and the nation of Israel returning from exile. He says, “The quotation from Isaiah 52 is referring to the Jews returning from exile, as they journeyed through the wilderness, they announced to all that they met that they were returning home because Yahweh has redeemed them. Isaiah described these returning exiles as having beautiful feet as they announced that their exile was over, and invited all whom they met to journey with them to Jerusalem where they could worship God together. The returning remnant gave this invitation because the prophets had said that, once the exile had ended, the nations would come to Jerusalem to worship the lord. Paul uses this as an example of the Christian pilgrimage in this life, this is how he envisions to ministry of the church. Having been delivered from the kingdom of darkness, from sin and despair, the church journeys toward her heavenly home. And as she journeys, she tells everyone she meets, that her God is the one who redeemed her. Everyone is invited to join in this pilgrimage and become a part of one of the witnessing redeemed communities. There is neither Greek nor Jew, but all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be redeemed.”

But a problem of unbelief rises in verse 16, Some translations interpret the verse to say, But not all Israelite's accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our report” Paul is continuing this comparison with the Jews in exile from Babylonian captivity. Judging by Isaiah lament, There were some who did not believe his report of salvation from captivity, there were some who did not want to return to Jerusalem and instead chose to remain in Babylon. Seeing the difficulties which lie ahead, or a perilous journey home, and then the work to rebuild the city, and their lives. It was easier, more comfortable to remain as they were. Paul equates their unbelief, and unwillingness to leave Babylon as the Israel of his time, unwilling to leave the former things of the old covenant, and come in and partake of the new. As we know from other passages throughout the new testament, many Jews came to know Christ, but many retained their old traditions, for it was comfort, and an intrinsic part of their national identity. Which is why Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians calling for grace and understanding, some still yet observed the sabbath, and dietary laws, and did so unto the Lord, others, most likely the Gentile believers did not, and to the Lord they did not observe those practices. But the important central binding thing between both individuals, or parties, was Christ, and a belief upon him.

But that is not what Paul is talking about here, he is talking about an unbelief, and unwillingness to believe the gospel report that the Messiah has come, and has risen to the right hand of the father. We as Christians today, read Isaiah 53 and see the clear cut picture and parallel of Christ, as Isaiah prophetically announced his suffering. And Paul, like Isaiah before, and sometimes we are the same, we Lament, Who has believed our report ? For it seems very few believe, and more often then not many fall by the wayside. So there is so much more at play here then a mere ascent, or understanding that there is a God, or that God does exist. Israel believed, they had a zeal for God, but they did not believe unto the salvation of their souls, for the faith which was needed was not given, so they remained in their sins, seeking redemption in empty practices and ritual, the things that were given as signs and examples they believed instead is what gave them their redemption and special status before God.

Paul here is painting this sort of circular picture, as we see by his line of questions in verse 14, How shall they call on him whom they have not believed, and how shall they believe if they haven't heard? And how shall they hear, unless someone tells them? Showing the importance of the gospel message preached and taught for it is the very word of God and has power to save souls. We do not know how the holy spirit works, but we can see the effect. The holy spirit is likened to the wind, you can't see it, but you can hear and see its effect.

Likewise it is the same in the new birth, we as God's children proclaim the good news of the gospel which we have been given, the word goes out, and many reject, many do not believe, many are comfortable in their lives like Israel in Babylon. But to some, in which the spirit has worked, find that the gospel cuts to the very heart and soul, exposing sin and rebellion, and the spirit touched soul cries out to God for forgiveness. Just as Paul concludes in verse 17, "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." You can't have one without the other, without the gospel there can be no faith and belief, for unless one hears of Christ and believes upon what he has done for their salvation, it is nothing more than a zeal and belief for God as Israel had, that is why we as Christians reject the idea that there are many ways to God, as some other religions may claim, for the bible points to the reality that the only way to come to God is through the Son, and that, is only through his blood that was shed, for the penalty and punishment of Sin that must be paid, and it is either paid on the cross by Christ, or upon our own heads by being cast out into eternal darkness forever separate from God, being cast into the lake of fire and eternal suffering paying for the penalty for a life of sin and rebellion against the one who has created us.

In the last few verses here of the chapter Paul brings to the forefront this reality of Israel's rejection of Christ, showing that it wasn't as if God has changed his mind, or changed his course but had warned Israel about this reality back even in the days of Moses. Paul here quoting Deuteronomy, and Isaiah applies this prophesy of God turning away from Israel for they are a stubborn and rebellious people who had turned to idols, so Moses bringing a message from God says, quoted by Paul in verse 19, "I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation." Paul knows that his readers in Rome will understand this to mean that God has opened the way of belief to the Gentiles, no longer is Israel the keepers of God's oracles, no longer is Israel gifted with the special revelations from God, they were given no excuse, having every advantage and yet they rejected God's messenger of salvation, the promised Son of David, the Messiah, Jesus. As the Psalmist proclaims in Psalm 19, which again Paul quotes here in verse 18, Of course they all know, because "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and there words to the end of the world."

The very nature of this world cries out to the glories of God, and Israel was given the law and the prophets to directly and specifically reveal the nature of God to them, but they repeatedly broke the covenant, repeatedly sought after idols and false Gods so Moses prophesies, there is a day coming when the Lord will provoke Israel to Jealousy, by turning his back on them and pursuing the gentiles, just as they had turn their back on him in pursuit of idols, and false righteousness by law and tradition. Making the oracles of God given to them, idols, worshiping the signs instead of the fulfillment. So now, we have the gentiles coming into the faith, believing upon Christ, and doing so in droves, as the gospel of Christ spreads throughout the world like wildfire...and just as Moses had prophesied, Israel is provoked to jealousy, despising the gospel and message of Christ all the more as they believed to be the special people of God, but they had rejected God's messenger, and he has turned to a people who were not his people. 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." and though God has turned to revealing himself to the gentile world, it isn't as though he has left Israel behind as Paul writes in verse 21, "but to Israel he says, All day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

The call has gone out, repent and believe upon the one whom God has given for the forgiveness and remission of sin. And that Call goes out to both Jew, and Greek, to both slave and free, to both rich and poor. In the gospel ministry of Christ there is no distinction, no favoritism, a simple call to all the peoples of the world to look upon the one who hung upon the cross, who gave his life so that all who believe upon him may live. And this message has not changed, and is indeed the same that was given to Israel through the covenants pointing to mans fallen nature and sin, and need for a redeemer, for one to come and offer up redemption for his people. Therefore, we like the exiles out of Babylon on their journey back to the promised land declare the greatness and mercy that the father has shown upon us in the sending of his Son, we should proclaim and shout from the rooftops of his forgiveness, the one and only hope given to a dying and lost world. But be prepared, for just as Israel rejected the message and sought to silence those who proclaimed it, so to is the unbelieving world, for this message of hope and forgiveness through Christ that we proclaim is an a front to the lives of those lost in their sins, who will seek to silence, through ridicule, mocking and persecution. But, it is not that the message of Christ goes unheard, for God has chosen to use the foolishness of its proclamation to call in those whom he has chosen. So in the end, it is he who is glorified, as he returns triumphantly to call forth his people out of this world, making a mockery of the wise and of the strong, justifying and saving the weak and despised of the world.

So the message goes out, repent, believe, and be saved from the wrath of God which is poured out upon all unrighteousness. The judgment and punishment of sin is inescapable, it is either paid by Christ sacrifice on the cross, or through an eternity spent in hell. There is no in between, and no second chances, that is why the author of Hebrews cries out saying, “Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” but repent, and believe