

Knowledge and Faith

Romans 9:30-10:13

July 3, 2011

As has often happened in Romans, our text this morning begins with a question. “What then shall we say?” Paul often uses a question from his opponents to start a new argument or move onto the next part of the argument he is making. Usually, after asking a question like this, he asks his opponents’ question for them. This time, however, the first question is not followed by a second. It is followed by a statement.

What shall we say in response to God’s sovereignty, His choosing to include Gentiles in the elect, and the even more incredible issue that some Jews will not be saved? “*That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it.*” (9:30,31) The Gentiles did not pursue righteousness, right standing before God, but they found it by faith. Israel pursued righteousness but missed it because they sought it by the Law and works.

Even more to the point, Israel could not get past **Jesus**. More specifically they couldn’t get past the cross. Jesus Himself was difficult enough to take. His teaching was odd and went against their natural inclinations. He took authority for Himself that only belonged to God. He said things that didn’t make sense. All these things and more led people to stop following Him by the thousands. The crowds went away and Jesus was left with a few hundred loyal followers. Then He went to the cross and the full curse of God fell on Him. Israel was

not about to follow and entrust her future to someone who had been cursed by God. The cross was too much to take.

Of course, this was God’s plan all along. He would bring salvation and redemption, not only by cursing His anointed One, but the one Who bore the curse would be His very Son. He said He was going to trip up the people near the end. The twistedness of our sinful hearts required that God save us in a way that we could not have imagined. It requires us to set our plans and lives aside and follow Him. When we try to force Him to do things in our way, it trips us up. Thus God said through Isaiah that the instrument of salvation would be the rejected stone which would be a snare for the people. Paul mixes two passages from Isaiah here. The first is Isaiah 8:14, “. . . and [the LORD Almighty] will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare.” The second passage is Isaiah 28:16. “*See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed.*” Paul combined these two passages because he saw that the rock that God would lay as the foundation for our salvation is the very stone over which the people would stumble. This is exactly what happened in Jesus.

So, Israel stumbled and missed the salvation God brought them. This failing of Israel and its result broke Paul’s heart. They were his brothers. He was one of them. He was an Israelite of the Israelites, a member of the tribe of Benjamin from which came their first king.

He was a Pharisee by training and zealous for God. That some of his people would not receive the salvation for which they had so long waited tore at him.

Indeed the thing that marked Israel for Paul, their defining characteristic, is that they were zealous. Zeal is good! We need **zeal**! If we are dealing with important things then why should we be half-hearted about them. If we belong to God, then let's be His all the way. We don't need half-measures. We don't need, as Don reminds us occasionally, to try to straddle the fence with one foot in God's kingdom and the other in the world. Let the people think of us as fanatics. Let's sing God's praises with loud voices. Why should they praise their sports teams more loudly than we praise our God? Why should we be bothered when they look down on us for being more excited about being in the presence of the infinite Creator of the universe than they are when somebody whacks a ball with a stick? We need the all consuming, life changing zeal the Jews had. We need to pursue God the way they did.

But blind zeal is not enough. It needs to be directed by the truth. If, like Israel, we are zealous after the wrong thing we will do more harm than good. Paul wrote, *"I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge."* (10:2) Paul describes his own situation here when he was still Saul of Tarsus. This is something he knew about! Nobody was more zealous than him. He ran after God and sought to defend the truth more than anybody else around him. He quickly became known as the persecutor of the church as he tried to wipe out the Jesus cult. He did all of this out of his zealous desire for God.

He did it because he did not understand the truth. He had stumbled over Jesus the same way most of Israel had. He did not know the truth and so he ran after the lie that Israel had built up over many generations. He had to be blinded by God on the road to Damascus before he could see the truth, and now his heart is broken because most of his people are in the same position he was in. *"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."* (10:3) Their zeal needed to be based on **knowledge** of the truth, not just what they wanted to believe or the lie of which they had convinced themselves.

Through this passage there are two things Paul declares necessary if we are to be saved. The first is knowledge. The second is faith. We must know what we believe. We must know the one on Whom we have faith. All the faith in the world will not save you if it is misplaced. Faith in Allah will not save you. Faith in Vishnu will not save you. Faith in the teachings of Confucius may help you live a better life, but it will not save you from your sin or God's wrath. Faith in Buddha will not save you. These are all false gods.

Just as important, as the ancient Israelites found out, even faith in the laws of God and trying to follow them will not save you. Having faith in keeping the law or in our own strength and effort will convince us that we are saved when we are not. **Faith** in the wrong thing actually keeps you from salvation. If we believe ourselves to be good we will not admit we need God. We will, in fact, believe He owes us salvation. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth.

Along with faith we must have knowledge. This is why I am always amazed when I hear people talk about doctrine as if it is a bad thing. Far from being bad, it is necessary. Doctrine is what is taught. Paul is pointing out here that there is a body of knowledge which one must have in order to be saved. This does not mean that you must have all your ducks in a row and be a seminary graduate before you can be saved. It does mean that there is a minimum amount of truth that must be learned, understood, and accepted if one is to be saved. God chooses who to save. God works in them to change their hearts. God does not do this in a vacuum. He uses His people and the truth the church has guarded and passed down from generation to generation in His word. God's people and His word are tools in His hands as He redeems His fallen creation for Himself.

We must know and submit to God's righteousness. It is righteousness that is revealed and provided through Jesus. As Paul wrote, "*Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*" (10:4) As we have already seen, the only way to righteousness with **God** is through faith in Jesus. In order to have faith in Him we must know Who He is.

Going back to the idea of righteousness through the law, Paul looks back to what Moses said about it. This is very important because it was through Moses that God gave the law to Israel. Moses said, "*The man who does these things will live by them.*" (10:5) But the same Moses also pointed out to the people that they were to have faith in God and look into their hearts to follow God's way. Look with me at Deuteronomy 30:11-14:

Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

This is not permission to follow our hearts wherever they lead. That always and only leads to trouble. It is an encouragement to trust the Lord to lead us and give us the strength to do what He tells us to do. We follow His word and obey His commands, and thanks be to God we can have His strength to do it!

This is even more true in the church than it was in ancient Israel. We have the Holy Spirit to help. We do not need Moses to climb the mountain and bring God's word down to us. We already have it in the Bible and the Holy Spirit's testimony to our spirits. We do not need to descend once more into the Red Sea to see God's faithfulness. We know He is faithful through what He has already done, in history and in our lives, and we hear His testimony to His faithfulness in us through His Spirit. His word is near us indeed! "*The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be*

saved.” (10:8,9) We must know enough to say “Jesus is Lord.” We must know Who He is. We must know that He died on the cross to pay for our sins and was raised from the dead that we might have life. We must know that the life He provides is available to all who believe the truth about Him and trust Him more than they trust anything else, especially themselves. Our mouths can only speak what our minds know. We must confess Jesus is our Lord with our mouths.

Of course, along with knowledge we also need faith. Once we know in Whom we are to put our faith, once we have that knowledge, we must actually put our faith in Him. Knowing where to find salvation is useless if we never seek that salvation out. To our knowledge, we must add faith. We must believe in our heart that the things we have heard about Jesus are true. These two things go together.

Paul adds, *“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”* (10:10) This is what is required for salvation. We must believe in the **truth** God has revealed through His word. This faith is a gift from God. It comes when the Holy Spirit gets a hold of us through God’s word and regenerates us. Jesus called it being born again. This faith is only the beginning. It changes the rest of our lives so that we talk and live differently. This is what Paul means when he says we confess with our mouths. This change of life that comes with the new birth is sanctification. It is living in light of the truth we have come to believe and through which we are justified. As we call on and follow God we will never be ashamed before Him. The world might try to

shame us, but if we are righteous and held by God’s power, no attempt to shame us will succeed.

And this is true for everyone. Paul still had not gotten over his amazement that God had brought Gentiles in His salvation and left some Jews out. Both groups come to God exactly the same way—through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. *“For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”* (10:12,13) And here in the middle of Paul’s argument, and the end of the section we are looking at this morning, we find yet one more quote from the prophets that shows God’s inclusion of the Gentiles and exclusion of many Jews should not be so surprising. The quote, *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,*” comes from the prophet Joel. That is what is required, and it is all that is required. It bears the implications we have been talking about in our belief and lives. If we know the Lord, and believe in Him enough to call on Him for salvation, surrendering our ways and our lives to Him, then we will be saved.

Paul is not done, but we are for this morning. We will pick up here next week as we look further at this need to know and believe. For now, let us gather around the table and commemorate together Jesus death on the cross—the truth by which we are saved and to which we have dedicated our lives. May we live with zeal for our Lord and faithfulness to Him.