

How Are They to Know?

Romans 10:14-21

July 10, 2011

We saw last week that faith outside of any knowledge of the truth cannot save. We must both have faith, and true knowledge of the one in Whom that faith is placed. We cannot be saved by God if we do not truly know Him. This does not mean we must know everything about Him. It does mean that the things we accept about Him must be true and based on what He has revealed about Himself in His word. That having been said, we finished with Paul's statement from the prophet Joel, "*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*" (Romans 10:13) Again, we must know the name if we are to call on it in connection with our salvation.

In Paul's larger argument, his concern is the fact that not all the Israelites would be saved. The Israelites were God's people and the recipients of God's promises. They knew they had a special position as the people through whom God was working out His plan of salvation. The issue was that they had forgotten the plan involved more people than just them. So, it was not all the Israelites that were saved, only those who called on the name of the Lord. At the same time, all the Gentiles who called on the name of the Lord would also be saved.

Joel was writing under the old covenant. For him, the name of the Lord was Yahweh. The Lord was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Paul had a different understanding. He knew that the God known by Joel and the other prophets had revealed Himself most clearly in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was God in the flesh. When Paul talked about the Lord he meant **Jesus**.

So, not all Israel would be saved, but only those who called on the name of the Lord, now revealed to be Jesus—the very one rejected and scorned by the Jews. Where does the problem lie? Why is it that God's people are missing His salvation? We saw last week that

they desired to be in right relationship with God and to serve Him, but that their desire was misplaced because they did not know the truth. Now, Paul looks more closely at the breakdown of why not all Israel would be saved.

Paul asks a series of questions, and provides the source for this message's title. "*How, then, can they call on one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?*" (v.14,15) If one is to call on the name of the Lord, one must first believe the truth about Him. If one is to believe the truth, he or she must hear it. If a person is to hear the truth, someone else must tell it to them. If someone is to tell the truth, they must be sent to the people who need to hear it that they might believe it, call on the name of the One proclaimed, and be saved.

This is why messengers from God are a good thing. Paul looked back to the prophets Isaiah and Nahum and their declaration, "*How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!*" (v.15) It is only as people carry the truth about God and the salvation He has provided that anybody can hear it, believe it, and act on it by calling on Jesus. Those who believe and are saved find the feet of those who brought them the message to be beautiful.

With Isaiah, Paul was upset that God's people would miss God's message of salvation. "*But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our message?' Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*" (v.16,17) Paul then looked at what of these conditions were met. If Israel did not believe, where was the interruption in the plan? If faith come by hearing the truth, and the truth is found in the word of God that came through Jesus

Christ, why is it that so few of God's people accepted the good news?

Paul wrote, *"But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did."* (v.18a) Was it because nobody was sent to them? Was there a failure on God's part to tell them? No. Paul looked to the Psalms to point out that God's message always gets where it needs to go. *"Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."* (v.18b) As Paul wrote these words men and women who had been in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost were already all over the Roman Empire sharing the news of Jesus' death and resurrection with their synagogues. Paul himself had taken the good news of salvation through Jesus to many cities, always sharing the message with the Jews first and then taking it to the Gentiles. People all over the Roman Empire had gone and preached the message. It's not that the **message** was not available.

Paul moved on. *"Again I ask: Did Israel not understand?"* (v.19a) Perhaps the message was preached but not heard. Maybe they just missed the meaning in the message.

For the answer to this Paul went both to Moses and Isaiah. *"First, Moses says, 'I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.' And Isaiah boldly says, 'I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.'"* (vv.19b,20)

This answer has two parts. First, **God** pointed out that this was going to happen. Through Moses God said that Israel would be envious of those who were not God's people. They would find themselves desiring the relationship with God people from the nations around them enjoyed. They would be angered that people they thought didn't know would end up knowing better than they did. This was part of the end of Moses' message.

Second, many who did not **seek** God would find Him, and God would reveal Himself to people who were not looking for Him. Israel thought they were looking for God. They thought they had a lock on the truth, but they misunderstood the truth they had been given. It is easier to teach somebody who knows they do not know than it is to teach somebody who thinks they know, but they don't. It is easier to give fresh information than it is to correct wrong information. Those who did not know God would find it easier to accept the new thing He was doing than would those who thought they already had God figured, but had missed the meaning of His message.

So, the message of salvation had gone out to the world. Preachers had been sent and they had preached. The message had also been heard. Israel should have understood what was going on because their own scriptures predicted it. It was not for a lack of hearing that Israel had failed to come to salvation. What, then, was the missing piece?

Paul answers this with another reference to Isaiah. *"But concerning Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.'"* (v.21) Israel had heard and understood the message. Israel just didn't **believe** it and would not submit to it. Believe and obedience are closely connected. You do not actually believe something unless you act on it. You also do not act on things you do not believe. Look at your behavior and you will learn what is most important to you and what your core beliefs are. Israel said they were God's people, but they would not admit that it was only by God's grace they were anything at all. They did not believe what God said about them. They did not submit to God's plan for them. Over and over again they rejected God's way and chose their own. God's response was to save a remnant of them, and to also save some of the people around them who they had thought did not stand a chance.

This whole time we have been dealing with Paul's concern for the Israelites and the amazing truth that some of Israel would not be saved while some Gentiles would be. Paul pointed out that the gospel was available to them, they had just rejected it. They did not have belief, faith, even though the knowledge had been shared with them. These verses still carry truth for us. It is still the case that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It is still the case that faith comes by hearing the message of salvation, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

If knowledge is so important for salvation, what is the church's responsibility in getting that knowledge out? What does this mean for us? We will see one answer to this next week as a representative from the Gideons International comes to share with us the work they are doing in the United States and around the world.

The church is charged with the task of making certain the people around us hear the message. This is why we give out Bibles and other literature at the Farmer's Market. We need to share the knowledge of the gospel.

Like Israel, many people in our society think they know God's message of **salvation**, but most of them really don't. Our culture has taken the knowledge of God and twisted it until we have made new gods and confused them for God as He has revealed Himself. As people seek the truth we need to be ready and willing to share it with them. On more than one occasion I have found myself trying to gently and humbly correct somebody's misunderstanding of God and way to salvation He has provided. Sharing God's truth is an especially difficult task in a culture that is rejecting the idea of truth. Yet we must always point to the reality of Jesus and His cross. People must believe the truth if they are to be saved.

Of course, this is part of the larger conversation about salvation being God's choice. There is another

sense in which this begins to answer another issue raised by the sovereignty of God as we have seen it over the last several weeks. We have pointed out that God's sovereignty is absolute and it is His choice who is saved and who is not. It has been common among those who hold to God's sovereignty to simply sit and quietly worship God by themselves. The Great Commission has often been lost in this group because, after all, if God is going to save someone, He will save them without any help from us.

Indeed, for many generations this was a popular position among many Baptists. Baptist missions really got their start when one member of a Baptist church in England began to think along the lines Paul is here. His church had taught for many years that God chooses, and so all we have to do is be grateful He chose us. This humble shoe maker named William Carey began to study the Bible and pray because passages like this one and the Great Commission seemed to go against what he believed about the sovereignty of God. As we said last week, God saves, but He does not do so in a vacuum. He uses knowledge of the truth. As Carey realized this he wrote a short book with a long title: *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. Shortly after he moved to India where he spent the rest of his life seeking those God had chosen there and translating God's word into Bengali.

Paul and William Carey answered God's call to carry the good news of God's offer of salvation to those who had not heard it. We live in a society that is filled with the message, but the people around us are not listening and so they still don't get it. We watch Christian TV and listen to Christian radio and we forget how easy it is to avoid these things. Even when people are exposed to the message it is drowned out by the other noises of life. Carey won few converts, but the translating work he did formed the basis of many people

coming to faith in God years later. Later, the first Baptist missionaries from the United States, Ann and Adoniram Judson, would go to Burma and share the gospel there.

We have the difficult task of sharing the gospel here with people who think they already know it. Salvation is not about your best life now. It is not God's goal to make you happy. God is not here to meet your every desire or the things you think are your needs. Being the best you can be will never be close to being good enough. You may be better than your neighbor, but you still fall far short of God's requirements of you. You are not **good** enough, but Jesus is. This is our message. It is the message that has been guarded and passed down by faithful people throughout the history of the church. We have been commissioned to share it with all so that those who have been chosen by God might believe in the truth, call on Jesus, and be saved.