

The Rejection of God

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[0 : 00] The reading this morning is from Romans chapter 10 verses 1 to 16. Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.

For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Christ is the culmination of the law, so there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Moses writes about this righteousness that is by the law. The person who does these things will live by them.

But if the righteousness that is by faith says, do not say in your heart who will ascend into heaven, that is to bring Christ down, or who will descend into the deep, that is to bring Christ up from the dead.

But what does it say? The word is near you. It is in your mouth and your heart. That is the message concerning faith that we proclaim.

[1 : 09] If you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

As scripture says, anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame. 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.

How then can they call on one they've not believed in? And how can they believe in the one whom they've not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

How can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. But not all the Israelites accepted the good news.

[2 : 14] For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our message? This is the word of the Lord. Good morning, St. Silas.

My name is Martin Ayers. I'm the senior minister here. Thanks, Tracy, for reading for us. And if you keep your Bibles open at Romans 10, we're looking at the whole chapter this morning. Just had a representative bit read for us.

And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet, if you find that helpful, just to see where we're going as we look at this bit of Scripture together. But let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let me pray.

Let me lead us as we all pray. Gracious almighty God and loving heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. And we ask that you will speak to us. And where we are foolish, that you would give us wisdom.

Where we're doubting, that you'll give us faith. That where we're drifting, that you will draw us back to you. Where we are in pain or grief or distress, you'll give us comfort.

[3 : 18] Where we are timid, you'll give us courage. That we might walk in the light as your children. In Jesus' name we ask. Amen. Amen. Well, it can be unnerving when people reject something that you love.

It can make you think, oh, maybe I'm wrong to love that. And peer pressure is strong for us. We see that on trivial levels. That sometimes finding out that everyone disagrees with you makes you rethink your views.

If you think, I was trying to think of an example. These last few years have not been an easy time if you live in the west end of Glasgow and you actually genuinely like instant coffee. It's just not the

done thing around here anymore to like instant coffee.

I remember starting at high school and suddenly, if you were a Blue Peter fan, you had to keep that quiet. Suddenly, primary school, it was fine to like Blue Peter. Secondary school, we all still liked it. But no one told anyone that they still watched it. But the truth is, we can feel uneasy about our whole worldview when we realize that other people around us see things completely differently.

[4 : 23] So how do we react when people around us think that it's mad to follow Jesus? When we ask ourselves the question, why aren't more people becoming Christians?

If you think about Christmas, we had a couple of carols by Candlelight Services here at St. Silas. They were so great, I just wanted to become a Christian all over again.

It was great. It was a joy, singing about Jesus coming into the world to save us. talks explaining the true meaning of Christmas, mince pies. It was a winner. But we invited many hundreds of people to those services.

Between us, the number of not yet believers we know who would have been invited would have been probably several thousand people. And then a few hundred came to those carol services, which was encouraging.

But the follow-up beyond that into the new year, as is not unusual, numbers suddenly dwindle. The number of people who came to church in January because they'd come to carols or came to our Life Explored course that we did to follow on.

[5 : 24] We had a reasonable start. We had a few tables of people coming to that course. But actually, compared to the number who'd come to carols, a huge fall-off in number.

And then that course, some people really committed and really making fresh decisions to follow Jesus. But actually, numbers dwindling over the course. As other people decided, well, no, I'm not really interested.

I'm not going to become a Christian. So the seed has been sown, but we don't see a lot of reaping. How does it make us feel? It might make us uneasy, even about our own faith, thinking, hang on a minute, am I barking up the wrong tree with this Christian thing?

Other people around me think it's boring, irrelevant, untrue. Or maybe we keep going, but we get a bit more quiet about being a Christian. We're more cautious.

And perhaps, in truth, we give up on wanting our friends to hear about Jesus because we've seen that message met with apathy or hostility. Now, in chapters 9 to 11 of Romans, Paul, the apostle, is dealing with an issue like that for the early church.

[6 : 31] He's writing to this church in Rome, and they've got a big issue, but in the first century, it's actually a much bigger issue. It's that the Jews, the ethnic descendants of Abraham, who had been God's people in the Old Testament and had the Bible, and they had the prophets who were promising the Messiah would come, they have, as a whole, if you looked at them as a whole, they have rejected the news, the claim, that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the rescuing king that God would send.

And Paul needs to help the first century church come to terms with that. But first, we see how he feels about it himself, and that's our first point, the heart's desire of the saved.

I don't know how you'd answer that question this morning. What's your heart's desire? What comes into your mind that your heart really desires? Well, Paul tells us his heart's desire in verse 1 of chapter 10, if you have a look.

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. That's not the only way that the Apostle Paul would have answered that question about what his heart's desire is.

I think first and foremost, he would have said his heart's desire is to know God, to get more of God, to know him better, to have eternal life, to have a close walk with Christ.

[7 : 51] We see that in Philippians 3. We see it in other things Paul wrote. So his heart's desires are ultimately met in the gospel promises to him from God. But for Paul, even though he has all the joy of knowing all he has in Christ, there's a pain that never goes away.

That his fellow nation, he was a Jew by ethnicity, the Israelites, on the whole, they've rejected the Messiah the prophets promised. And he told us how he feels about that.

We saw it last week in chapter 9, verse 1, just back over a page. He said in verse 2, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

Why? For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. There's this great emotional burden in Paul's life. And it's good that we remember that model as we think about our own expectations of the Christian life. We thought last week about how, in a way, it's a sign of Christian maturity to have a contented discontent.

[8 : 58] We shouldn't be yearning for the day that we think we'll come as a Christian when we just think everything is well and I have nothing to be sorrowful about, nothing to be distressed about.

It's not realistic. We are content as Christians because we believe the promises of God in the gospel for ourselves, the ones we've heard about in Romans so far, that we've been given righteousness from God as a gift when we put our trust in Jesus.

He looks on us and He forgives our sins. He doesn't see our sin anymore. We're forgiven. We know God today. We have the hope of glory, certain hope, depending on what Jesus did for us.

And we live by the Spirit today so that we're adopted into God's family. We know Him as our Heavenly Father and the Spirit frees us from the power of sin so that we can become more and more like Jesus.

We are content in the wonder of God's promises. We're joyful. But at the same time, we are burdened with a great sorrow for the people around us.

[10 : 01] For what we most want for them, however troubling their practical situation might be, however difficult other things might be going on in their lives, our heart's desire for them, ultimately, is that they would trust Jesus Christ.

So let me ask you, as we see Paul's example there, do you feel that anguish that he felt? Do you feel that burden for your not-yet-believing friends and family and colleagues and classmates around you?

So that you speak to God about people and you speak to people about God. Where I'm from in the north of England, there's this motorway across the north of England, the M62, and one day, there was a terrible fog on the motorway and visibility was down to just a few meters.

And there was a horrendous pile-up of cars as cars just drove into this pile-up in the fog. But just a few hundred yards back from the pile-up, cars were still driving along at 60 or 70 miles an hour in this terrible fog, not able to see what was coming.

No idea that, beyond their visibility, they were about to smash into this line of cars. And the highway maintenance people were so distressed knowing what was just along the road that people couldn't see and knowing they couldn't stop the cars that they resorted to picking up traffic cones from the roadside and throwing them onto the motorway so they would hit the windscreens of the cars to shock them into stopping.

[11 : 36] They were just desperate on the sidelines. And friends, when you look at the people around us in our city, through the glasses of Romans, it leads us to that same kind of desperation.

The people around us, they can see that the world is broken. We can all see that, that something has gone terribly wrong in our world. What did Romans 1 tell us to do with that?

How do we interpret the brokenness all around us, the brokenness the street pastors see at night? Well, Romans 1 told us that we look at that and we see it as evidence that our relationship with God has been broken.

We are under the wrath of God for our sin and He is handing us over to our own desires. But when the people around us see the brokenness of the world, what do they see?

What do they say about God? How do they interpret it? They say there's no God, don't they? That's what people say. There cannot be a God because this stuff is happening.

[12 : 41] They interpret it completely wrongly instead of coming to Jesus. And the church, well we're like those highway maintenance people, we're on the roadside throwing things at the windscreen in desperation.

We're pleading to God about people and we're pleading to people about God. Longing that people would wake up to the danger just over the horizon and turn to Jesus for the refuge that only He can provide and He is glad to provide.

He came and died to provide refuge from the coming wrath of God that we all face for turning away from Him. So that's our first point that we see from Paul, the heart's desire of the saved.

But there's another problem here and it's this. Does Israel's rejection of God mean that God can't be trusted? Because Israel were God's people once in the Old Testament.

He called them His Son. And now they're not God's people. So has God abandoned them? And if God abandoned them, might He abandon us who trust in Jesus?

[13:49] So why did Israel fail? That's what Paul is helping us with in these chapters and it culminates next week. But our second point is this, the offensive discovery of the saved.

The heart's desire of the saved, the offensive discovery of the saved. Now last week Paul demonstrated that God has been faithful to His promises. That was in Romans chapter 9. God hasn't broken His promises when Israel misses that Jesus is the Messiah.

Rather, it's simply the case that God had always said not everybody in Israel is one of God's people. He chose some of them to be saved and others are not chosen.

He's chosen to have mercy on some. Now this week Paul tells us that when people hear about Jesus and they reject the message, ultimately we shouldn't blame God for that.

It's not God's responsibility, it's their responsibility. So Paul tells us why Israel rejected Jesus. There is a tragedy about it. If you look at verse 2 of chapter 10, he says, for I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

[15:01] And we struggle with that today, don't we? We see people who are passionate and sincere about what they believe and we sort of think to ourselves, well, maybe God will find a way to honour that in some way, but the reality is their zeal is without knowledge and zeal without knowledge is actually, it's a bad thing.

It's not a healthy thing. It's why many of us have been praying for our Muslim friends during Ramadan. I got the prayer feed from our mission partners, Mitchum and Rosie, I don't know how many of you joined in with that, praying for Muslims around the world for 30 days during Ramadan. And my prayer feed just a few days ago from Rosie said this, somewhere in the middle of the last 10 days of Ramadan, no one knows exactly when, is a night supposedly designated by God to be a night of power or night of destiny.

It's considered supremely special as any acts of worship performed on this night are worth more than a thousand months of the same act on other nights. Rewards for good deeds are magnified and sins are more likely to be forgiven.

Muslims are seeking God more intentionally on this night than any other. The zeal is admirable, isn't it? I was at, I had a curry at the Shish Mahal over the road served to me by a Muslim.

[16:17] I said, I can't believe you can do this job during Ramadan. You can serve food like this and you're fasting. Incredible zeal. But it's zeal without knowledge and we pray that Muslims will stop and think and that Jesus will make himself known to them however he can through us, through visions, through dreams.

We pray that Jesus will make himself known so that their zeal gets accompanied by knowledge of the truth. And the mistake that Israel made when it comes to this zeal without knowledge is one that we see all over human religion and we see it in churches as well all over the place.

It's in verse 3. of chapter 10 Paul tells us what they got wrong. Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own they did not submit to God's righteousness. In other words they didn't know that you could be righteous with God as a gift from him by grace so they were determined to be righteous by their own good works their own merit to be accepted by God.

Their approach to the law of God the commandment was if I obey them I can be accepted. And they even used verses of the Bible to support that position. So Paul gives one in verse 5 he says Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law.

[17:38] The person who does these things will live by them. I think that Paul is probably using a verse there that his opponents the Israelites who said no no no you have to obey God to be accepted they would have been using that verse.

and so Paul quotes it but the problem is who can do that? None of us is able to do these things to obey the law of God. None of us is good enough for God.

Each one of us has done something wrong at some point in our lives and once you've done something wrong you've blown the idea of being righteous in God's sight by the law.

You can't make up for it by doing other good stuff because that's just doing your duty anyway. So what was Israel meant to do with the law of God? Well the law is like a mirror that we hold up to ourselves and it exposes what we're really like it shows us up so that we know that we've fallen short.

The law of God shows you that you need a rescuer if you're going to be right with God and that prepared the way for the Messiah coming for Jesus. He says that in verse 4 Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

[18 : 48] And so we see that in Jesus don't we in the gospels he deeply offends the religious leaders when he confronts them by saying they're not good enough for God and he welcomes sinners who will admit they're wrong and they're offended by that because they're self-righteous and they think how dare Jesus spend time with these sinners I'm not a sinner.

But the message we hear in Romans is whatever kind of person we are there's no difference we've all fallen short of the glory of God. It's a deeply humbling message the ground around the cross is level ground whoever we are.

It's a bit like they have this illustration on the Christianity Explored course that we run here from time to time where they have a bunch of people up front and they say if you were to die tonight and God was asked to ask you why should I let you into heaven what would you say to him and they list some of the things people might say to God why should I let you into heaven let me in because I'm a good person let me in because I'm not a murderer let me in because I don't steal let me in because I don't lie let me in because I give blood I give to charity all the good things that we do let me in because I try to treat others like I would want to be treated myself that's my moral for life that's what I'm trying to do let me in to heaven let me in because I'm not a rapist there are people around who are worse than me let me in because I go to communion we might point to some of the religious things that we do let me in because I'm a spiritual person let me in because I read the bible I go to church I got baptized I go to church religious things that we do good deeds that we do and on the video they just take them and they just tear them up just to say to people you've got to let go of these things don't think you can stand before God and appeal to anything you have done to get into heaven we can't be righteous by our own works and that is deeply offensive to people to hear that if you've built your identity on being a good person it is offensive to hear from God you can't be good enough for God the bible says being good doesn't get you into heaven and I guess we can think of lots of things that Christians believe that people get offended by can't we but I wonder if this is the most offensive thing we believe the bible says being good doesn't get you into heaven that's where Israel stumbled but if we can come to terms with that that discovery then the gospel is wonderful news and that's our third point the simple confession of the saved in verse 12

Paul summarizes the position that everyone's in the same boat verse 12 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 and that's not just a New Testament idea it's running right through the whole bible so that's that's what Paul proves to us in verses 5 to 11 he quotes Moses in Deuteronomy Moses was on the plains of Moab with God's people they hadn't yet entered the promised land and he urges them to keep trusting God so that they can be righteous in God's sight as they enter the promised land but he didn't say to them you better obey God perfectly or he won't accept you no look what Paul quotes in verses 6 and 7 this is what Moses said to them he's added the bits about Christ as Christ fulfills it but Moses said don't say in your heart who will ascend into heaven don't say who will descend to the deep so Moses was saying it's not too hard for you to be righteous in God's sight you don't have to go into heaven to get it you don't have to go across the oceans to get it you just need to have faith in God's promises call on his name and have life and now that Christ has come we do that through him so we see that in verse 9 if you declare with your mouth

[23 : 15] Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved now Paul's writing poetically there it's not it's not that he's expecting that those will be two separate things that you'd say one thing with your mouth and no one thing in your heart it's the poetry to describe righteousness coming as a gift to us through faith if you simply trust that Jesus died for your sins on the cross to be your saviour and he rose from the grave to be our Lord you're saved it's the same for everyone it's wonderful it's a wonderful thing to be saved isn't it to be rescued we've got two teenage lads in St.

Silas who've had close calls in the last couple of weeks who needed to be rescued Alexander Melrose don't think he's here today clearing out his great uncle's house in Edinburgh finds a hand grenade in the house from World War II calls the police the police come the army come he got rescued it's a great thing to be saved Angus Stuart up in Perthshire two weeks ago Duke of Edinburgh expedition fell 20 metres from an aqueduct and the rescue operation involved the fire

brigade the ambulance staff mountain rescuers came from Edinburgh and Fife up to Perthshire he got rescued it's a wonderful thing that he got rescued and it's wonderful to hear in the Bible that we all were made for a rescue to know the riches of God's love for us and his mercy and his grace that he would rescue us by sending Jesus we just need to have the humility to let go of our own attempts to be righteous by our works so that we can pursue it by faith by trusting

God's promise and call upon the name of Jesus lay your deadly doing down down at Jesus feet stand in him in him alone gloriously complete so if it's that simple what stops people from being saved that's our fourth point so we've heard about the simple confession of the saved fourthly the beautiful feet of the saved what Paul does in verse 14 is he gives us the links in a chain that would lead somebody to get saved by God so that we can look at it and work out well why didn't Israel get saved where did the chain break the chain is in verse 14 if you have a look how then can they call on the one they've not believed in and how can they believe in the one of whom they've not heard and how can they hear without someone preaching to them and how can anyone preach unless they are sent as it is written and then he quotes Isaiah how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news now the key point for this chapter that

Paul's making is Israel did hear of Jesus because people did preach to them because people were sent to them he says that in verse 17 faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word about Christ but I ask did they not hear of course they did in verse 19 did they not understand again yes so when it comes to Israel's rejection of the Messiah where does the fault lie verse 21 at the end of the chapter but concerning Israel God says all day long I've held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people in other words the responsibility is with them and not with God that's the key point here for the argument in chapters 9 to 11 of Romans don't be thrown don't be destabilized into doubting God because Israel didn't accept Jesus God God is not responsible for that he held out his hands to them and they disobeyed but even as Paul writes that he's writing a letter where at the end he's going to tell us he's going on mission to Spain where people have never heard and we're left to work through this checklist for everyone else friends here are five barriers to being saved by

God many people don't call on the name of Jesus today because they've heard about him and they don't believe in him they don't trust him they won't accept the message but other people don't get saved because they don't hear about Jesus they've never heard of him in language they can understand so they're left dead in their sins without ever hearing of the offer of salvation now why don't they hear Romans 10 because nobody goes to preach to them why does no one go to preach to them because no one sends them no one sends preachers to them Hudson Taylor was a Christian who went to China in the 19th century to share the gospel in China one of the first men who came to faith through Hudson Taylor in China a young man said to him how long have you had the good news in England Hudson Taylor said we've known for hundreds of years and the young man replied what hundreds of years is it possible that you have known about Jesus so long and only now have come to tell us my father sought the truth for more than 20 years and died without finding it or why did you not come sooner so folks this last section invites us each of us to ask ourselves will we have beautiful feet could you go could we at

[29 : 05] St. Silas send you to preach to a nation where people have never heard of Jesus Christ to bring the word of God to them so that they can call on his name and be saved from God's coming wrath and if you won't go if it's not appropriate for you to go could you send could you give money and prayer time to support those who do go so that the good news is heard by more people overseas and here in our own city there are hundreds of thousands of people who have never really understood the simple message of this chapter of Romans where could you have beautiful feet this week could you do that for somebody be beautiful feet for them and for us as a church do we feel that burden to make sure that the people of our city have heard about Jesus and that righteousness can come to you by faith in him because it gets preached to them by us because we're sent to them we're sent people in

Glasgow today it's a mentality that should drive us it shapes our model of church I sometimes say to newcomers at St. Salas so you'll know if you've been to a newcomer's lunch that we need to see ourselves as a lifeboat and not a cruise liner it's tempting when we think of church to almost think of church like it's a cruise liner we arrive in a new city and we check out the websites we work out which church might suit our tastes and we pick one where we'll feel most comfortable it's like a cruise holiday but if people in our city are perishing without Christ it's a rescue operation that we're

in together and we're like a lifeboat seeking to haul drowning people out of the ocean and if we rescue people they join us in helping rescue others now if that's our picture of church then the more people we rescue the more uncomfortable we're going to start to get we might find you know you're on a lifeboat like that and we keep hauling people in you get to a point you feel it's quite full here we're running out of space but we want to keep hauling people in because they're drowning how would we feel if someone on the boat said can we stop can we stop trying to get everyone in I'm going to lose my seat we wouldn't accept it would we so it's a whole mentality for us as a church that we want to have beautiful feet and share the message and we see vitally here as well don't we how we reach out that ultimately we have a message people need to hear so that they can trust it and believe it and be saved so don't mishear me about that I know that there are times when we have to do a lot of work with people before the gospel would be given a reasonable hearing by them we need to be involved in people's lives we need to have meaningful friendships with people genuine friendships with people and that takes time often before they're willing to listen to us about what we believe but Romans 10 reminds us that ultimately our intention that drives us in prayer and with people is we're longing for the chance that people would hear and be saved it's not belong before you believe it's hear the message and put your faith in it so every person is going to be answerable to

God one day for our own response to that final link in the chain if we have heard did we believe what we heard and call on the name of the Lord we'll stand before God and answer to him for that but what we also want to do is make sure that we've done everything we can for the people around us and the people of the nations so that the chain doesn't break before that as people are sent with beautiful feet to bring good news let's pray together heavenly father we recognize from Romans 9 your sovereignty and salvation that your saving work is a work of your mercy and so we call on you to have mercy on us and on the people around us father god we hear today the responsibility each of us holds for how we are responding to your gospel promise of righteousness for anyone who calls on the lord so for us here today who have heard we ask that you'll help us to respond rightly to you for the people around us who have zeal without knowledge we ask that you'll make yourself known to them for those who have never heard would you give us beautiful feet that bring good news we ask in Jesus name amen