

Justified  
United Church of Broomfield  
August 13, 2023

Romans 10:1-15 (CEB)

1 Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire is for Israel's salvation. That's my prayer to God for them. 2 I can vouch for them: they are enthusiastic about God. However, it isn't informed by knowledge. 3 They don't submit to God's righteousness because they don't understand [God's] righteousness, and they try to establish their own righteousness. 4 Christ is the goal of the Law, which leads to righteousness for all who have faith in God.

5 Moses writes about the righteousness that comes from the Law: The person who does these things will live by them. 6 But the righteousness that comes from faith talks like this: Don't say in your heart, "Who will go up into heaven?" (that is, to bring Christ down) 7 or "Who will go down into the region below?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the message of faith that we preach). 9 Because if you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord" and in your heart you have faith that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 Trusting with the heart leads to righteousness [some translate as justification] and confessing with the mouth leads to salvation. 11 The scripture says, All who have faith in him won't be put to shame. 12 There is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all, who gives richly to all who call on him. 13 All who call on the Lord's name will be saved.

14 So how can they call on someone they don't have faith in? And how can they have faith in someone they haven't heard of? And how can they hear without a preacher? 15 And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who announce the good news.

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When we say, "talk is cheap," we understand it to mean that it is easier to talk about doing something than to actually do that thing. This phrase usually encourages someone into action, hopefully. Action – "to be the hands and feet" of Jesus. Don't just "talk the talk, walk the walk." We preach the gospel of love, compassion and service AND we demonstrate that as well. Yes – this is true.

We value action over words....

SO... does that mean we should NOT talk about our faith? Should we NOT think that what we have to say about God, Jesus, the gospel is important? Are we able to (or even allowed to) talk about our faith, about what we actually believe and why?

During Paul's time- speaking about beliefs, belief in the Messiah, could be fatal. Likewise, speaking about it generated arguments, disagreements so heated that it caused fractures in a burgeoning faith community; such fractures were the impetus for much of our New Testament – Paul's letters written to churches in flux about beliefs and practices. Then there were the anti-religious or the naysayers, who simply didn't want to hear about – your "mumbo-jumbo." They had more important things to do, like work and survive.

Not much has changed in the last two thousand years. Today, it can be equally as challenging to speak of one's faith. It can still be fatal in parts of this world for someone to speak about their beliefs, including here in the United States. Religious disagreements? Just count the number of different denominations and houses of worship all claiming to believe in the same Jesus Christ and preach the same gospel. I don't know about you,

but routinely when I mention my profession or my faith or dare I engage in the controversial practice of discussing religion instead of the weather, I get shut down faster than the speed of life. Talking about faith can be difficult.

And then there's the converse and paradoxical reality; those who are constantly speaking about their beliefs, slavishly and rigidly devoted to regurgitating scripture and what they deem as literal and accurate knowledge. Those so-called true believers who bellow so loudly and so often that instead of speaking a dialogue of faith in God, it seems heartless, unreasonable, and out of touch. As Paul says, "2...they have a zeal for God, but it is not based on knowledge. 3 Not knowing the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness."

I worry that too many people have a passion and a sincere belief in Jesus Christ that is based in God's righteousness, God's **justification**, but are intimidated by the stigmas surrounding being religious and faithful; not wanting to sound like those blowhards, not wanting to offend, worried about having the right words to simply share the gospel. How do we not feel discouraged, but confident and joyful? How do we get to (or return to) that place where we're excited to talk about our faith, to confess it and share it, to "speak the **language** of Godly love and compassion," knowing that our talk **isn't cheap**, but invaluable?

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Paul is writing to a Roman church that's struggling with a conflict between Jewish Christians, who recently returned to Rome after being expelled by the emperor, Claudius, and the Gentile converts who likely made up most of the group in the small house churches that dotted the city. Paul's trying to help them get **their terms right**, since both groups tend to auto-correct their language and understanding back to what they knew before they became followers of Jesus.

Indeed, Paul's been making a particular argument throughout the letter to the Romans, inviting them to take on a common **vocabulary**. Here's a quick review:

- In Romans 1-3, Paul reminds them that everyone, both Jew and Gentile, are under a slavery that's far more insidious than anything we could ever imagine; "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," he says in 3:23.

- In chapter 4, Paul reveals God's solution to the problem through the covenant with Abraham, who placed his faith in God and became the father of the nation of Israel, whom God was going to bless so that they, in turn, would be a blessing to the world, drawing all the nations to God. Through Moses, God gave Israel the law as a way of marking them as a called out and set apart people.

- Israel struggled with the law, however, and Romans 5-8 reveals that **the law itself** wasn't the ultimate solution to the world's problems. In fact, the law only pointed out what sin was, not how to get out from under it. Focusing on the law, Paul says, will only keep you focused on sin itself. The law itself won't save us; only faith in Christ -- the one who came from Abraham's family and was faithful to God in a way that Israel could not be -- can do that.

What Paul has been doing, therefore, is mapping out the **common language** and community that was now possible for both Jews and Gentiles to share because of what God has done in Jesus -- the **language of faith**. Whereas the Jews once focused on the law and the Gentiles once focused on philosophy and social status, now their common focus was on Christ.

This brings us to chapter 10 and Paul's desire that those who are stuck in the **old language of law**, his fellow Israelites, might still be saved. "They don't submit to God's righteousness because they don't understand [God's] righteousness, and they try to establish their own righteousness. Christ is the goal of the Law, which leads to righteousness for all who have faith in God" (vv. 3-4). For Paul, "righteousness" [being justified] is another way of **talking about God's covenant faithfulness**, or **God's** following through on the plan to rescue the world that was announced to Abraham. Christ was the climax of that plan, and now God's covenant faithfulness not only extends to the Jews, but to all who believe and have faith in Christ.

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Problem is, however, that when many people say "faith," they actually mean "law," and vice versa. Paul defines these terms distinctly in verses 5-8. Moses defined the "righteousness that comes from the law" as the things that one does -- namely, adherence to the commandments.

Paul never denies that obedience is something that God requires from us, but outward obedience to a set of rules isn't the primary way we become the people of God. Becoming the people of God requires the "righteousness of faith," putting our complete trust in God and patterning our lives after their Son. Faith doesn't spend its energy trying to be so righteous as to go up to heaven to find God, nor does it wait for death to find God, either. Faith recognizes that God has come to us in Christ, who descended from heaven and was raised from the dead.

In short, God doesn't require us to be Bible badgers. Our faith isn't expressed by cracking people over the head with a Bible and reminding them of the rules they're not following. That's not what anyone wants to hear. Nor is it about focusing on the rules as the primary way we can make ourselves acceptable to God. What about love? If we depend upon our own self-righteous adherence to a set of laws as "*what it means to be a true Christian*," then our lives look foolish and wasted.

Instead, Paul says, we're to focus on a faith defined as giving our whole allegiance to Christ.

How do we do that? How do we live justified by faith? We believe...in our hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead. Death is the curse that results from human sin. The law told us what sin was and reminded us of its consequences. Jesus, however, has reversed that curse. In Jesus, God has defeated death, and those who believe in him with their whole hearts will share in his resurrection. And because death has been ultimately defeated for us, that means that we can live as people who are free from fear. "Salvation" isn't just some future hope, it's a present reality!

We also do that by "confessing with our lips that Jesus Christ is Lord." This is what we do at baptism and/or confirmation. It's a confession isn't just dogmatic agreement to a set of principles about Jesus. Instead, we confess (admit, declare, acknowledge) that Jesus Christ is *Lord*. The implications of that confession would have been startling to those Roman Christians. For them to say Jesus is Lord meant that Caesar is not Lord, and to say that meant they were committing treason against the empire (which was, in fact, the charge that sent many of them to their deaths). Confessing Jesus as Lord meant then, and it means now, that we're giving our allegiance to a new way of life, with Christ as the ruler of all. To speak of Jesus as Lord is to say that we're his subjects and that we will order our lives according to his lordship.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vollenweider, Don. *Bible Badgers*. Homiletics. August 10, 2014.

When given the opportunity to talk about our faith (and we have far more opportunities than we admit), are we comfortable, elated and ready to say that Jesus **IS** my Lord? My teacher? The one who guides my daily living? In verse 11, Paul reminds us that, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame (Isa. 28:16). It doesn't matter if you're a Jew or a Greek, if you're loud or quiet, if you're gay or straight, if you're black or white, if you're American or African; when you are in Christ, you will always be made right!

We must never forget that as believers in Jesus Christ, we are to share him with the rest of the world. "But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed?" says Paul, "And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim them?" Talking about and living out our faith in Christ are the ways in which God uses us to bring grace into the world. It's not about badgering people into it, but about sharing the grace and love of Christ.

Is talk cheap? Sometimes. But, when we remember that ""The WORD is near you, in your mouth and in your heart," God's righteousness will prevail and that's worth everything. "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer" (Ps 19:14).

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