

**“Saving Faith”**  
**Romans 10:5-13**  
**May 14, 2023**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

The two words of today’s sermon title are both of great significance. The first word speaks of salvation, which many today find offensive because they reject the notion that they need saving. But the Bible is clear that the human race is in fact in need of salvation because of our rebellion against our Creator. If God thinks we need saving, particularly when it’s a salvation from his wrath, then it is fatally unwise for us to draw the opposite conclusion.

The Bible is also crystal clear in stating that this salvation comes to us by faith alone. What is this faith that brings to us such a great salvation? It is the key that delivers us from the punishment our rebellion deserves, so we must make sure to get it right. If a person has a fatal form of cancer, and there is only one medicine that can bring healing, that person’s full attention will be devoted to securing that life-giving medicine. Imagine that medicine is locked in a bank’s safe deposit box in your name, and you are then given the key to that box. That is what faith is. It is not the medicine itself. Jesus alone saves us, but faith is the instrument by which we partake of the salvation brought to us by Jesus.

What is the nature of this faith that is the instrument of our salvation? I can remember sitting at my grandparent’s kitchen table about fifty years ago when the topic of life after death came up. My grandfather asked, “To get into heaven all that’s required is to believe, isn’t it?” I’m still not sure what he meant by that, and if I could turn back the clock and have that conversation with him again, I would want to ask him an important clarifying question. “Dad (that was our name for my grandfather), when you say that believing is the only requirement, what do you mean by believing?” The purpose of this part of Romans is to answer that question. Paul has made it clear that salvation comes by faith, and in today’s passage he tells us the exact nature of this saving faith.

**I. It Renounces Works Righteousness – v. 5-7**

Paul’s main point in these first three verses is that righteousness by means of obedience to the law is unattainable. He goes to the Old Testament itself to make the point that if you want life by the law of Moses, then you are signing up for full obedience to that law, something which is unattainable.

On the contrary, righteousness by faith speaks a different message. **“Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down) or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).”** Consider that first phrase, the one that exhorts us not to say something in our heart. Everyone has a heart message, something they are deeply committed to. Often, this heart message is just something that is assumed and not carefully examined. The native state of man is to have a heart message that says, “I will be okay if I can just (fill in the blank).” People fill in that blank with various laws and duties. But no matter what law is self-assigned, we always fall short of keeping it. Some simply say, “I just need to do my best.” Does anyone always do their best? Others say, “I just need to please the significant people in my life,” a clear impossibility for anyone who’s ever gone down that road. Still others might look to a successful career, or well-behaved children, or any number of things in order to deal with the universal and deep sense that things are not as they should be in one’s life. No matter what law or duty we may assign ourselves, we will always fall short of that standard.

Paul offers an example with the Jewish notion of a Messiah. The Jews looked to their promised Messiah as the solution to their problems. Human effort, however, would never be sufficient to bring this Messiah. Would any human ever be able to ascend to heaven, grab the Messiah by the arm and bring him down to earth? And when the Messiah did come with the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, they crucified him. Would it ever be possible by human effort to enter the world of the dead and bring Christ back to life? Paul’s point is that our salvation comes not by human effort but by God’s initiative, specifically his initiative with the incarnation and resurrection of Christ.

Most Christians know at one level that righteousness does not come by human effort. Yet we often fall back into this error of works righteousness, thinking that we would feel better about ourselves if we only performed better. But it doesn’t work that way. The path of faith rejects the solution of human effort and instead rests in God’s great acts of redemption through Christ. Someone might be thinking, “Is there nothing, then, from the human side that we need to do.” There is, and Paul addresses that next.

## **II. It Engages Both Mouth and Heart – v. 8-10**

Instead of assigning ourselves some unattainable duty that is always distant from us, Paul says we need to look much closer to home for the solution. Faith involves an action of the mouth and the heart. From the human side, these are the two components of saving faith. You must **“confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead”** (v. 9). If you do these two things, the Bible says, **“you will**

**be saved.”** Let’s look at these two components, beginning with the confession of Jesus’ lordship.

Of these two components of saving faith, the confession of Jesus’ lordship is the one that gets the least attention in today’s church. Our culture tends to value authentic heart attitudes and to minimize the importance of words. But what does it mean to confess that Jesus is Lord, and why does the Bible place such importance on it? Does it simply mean to go into a room by yourself and say the words, “Jesus is Lord?” Saying the words, “Jesus is Lord” is not some magic formula that accomplishes a miraculous salvation. Rather, it means to make a public identification with Jesus as your authority. Consider the word “confess.” The assumption is that such confession is made to someone else. It has a communal nuance of identifying yourself with others who believe the same truth. The content of the confession is the Lordship of Jesus, and to confess Jesus as Lord means that we put ourselves in the place of submission to his authority.

We have human analogies of this. In America, we have a Pledge of Allegiance in which we pledge ourselves to be faithful to our nation. When our political leaders are inaugurated into their offices, they must pledge loyalty to the U. S. Constitution in the case of federal office-holders. Citizens of Great Britain make the following Oath: “I, (name), do swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty, King Charles, his heirs and successors, according to law. So help me God.” Specifically, then, what is being required here is a public identification with Jesus and his people. The clearest application of this is membership in a gospel-preaching church. When people join our church, they make a public statement in the form of saying “I do” to the membership vows.

I listened to an interview this week with Molly Worthen, a history professor at the University of North Carolina and a contributing columnist at the *New York Times*. She reported how she grew up in a secular home and never went to church. Though she reported that most of her academic colleagues said they believed in God, the vast majority would not have considered themselves serious Christians. But God drew her to himself and she was converted. She reported that it was her baptism and public statement of faith in Christ that shocked her academic colleagues. This public identification with Christ was a crossing of the Rubicon for Worthen.

The second component of saving faith on the human side is a heart belief that Jesus was raised from the dead. What does it mean to believe in the heart? When the Bible speaks of the heart, it is referring to the total of all of our personhood: our mind, emotions, desires and will. To believe in the heart, then, means more than giving mental assent to something. The more that is meant is well-expressed by the word “trust.” There is a famous preacher’s illustration of the tightrope walker Charles Blondin, who crossed Niagara Falls

on a tightrope around 300 times in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He once asked onlookers if they believed he could cross while carrying someone on his back, and they all agreed that he could do so. But when he asked for volunteers to be carried, no one was willing. That's the difference between mental assent and trust, and to believe in the heart is to trust.

The content of this trust is the resurrection of Christ. Why not some other aspect of Christ's redeeming work, such as his incarnation, death or ascension? Faith in all those is necessary, but the resurrection is singled out because it shows God's determination to make new all that's gone wrong. With the resurrection, God is reversing the effects of sin and recreating the world.

If you are here today and not a follower of Christ, I want to encourage you to focus your investigation of Jesus on these two matters. Has Jesus been raised from the dead? If so, then he is Lord. People considering faith in Christ sometimes get tripped up on other biblical issues such as sexual morality, God's judgment, and some of the harder issues of the Bible. Those are not unimportant, but they are not the places to start. Start with the resurrection of Jesus. If he has in fact been raised, then he is God and he is in the process of making new all who follow him.

### **III. It Brings Riches – v. 11-13**

Verse 12 states that God bestows his riches on all who call on him. Three riches are noted for those who believe in God. Here's the first: **“Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”** The shame in view here is the shame of trusting in something on Judgment Day that will prove completely inadequate. In a fourth century commentary on Romans, Ambrosiaster wrote the following: “On the day of judgment, when everything will be overthrown, then those who believe in Christ will rejoice, seeing it revealed to all that what they believed is true, and what was thought to be foolish was wise.”

The second benefit of faith is the removal of all distinctions between people. **“There is no distinction between Jew and Greek.”** It's not that faith makes everybody the same. There are still differences between people and between different races of people. The distinction Paul is countering in this statement is when we use differences with others in order to feel superior to them. The gospel removes the thirst to feel superior by blessing us with every spiritual blessing in Christ. It is not only racial distinctions that are removed, but also distinctions based on gender, social class, educational level, political views, and any other distinction people might be tempted to use to feel themselves superior to others. In other words, the gospel is the source of the unity we all recognize as being so needful today.

The third benefit of faith is the freedom to call upon the Lord. That phrase appears twice in the final two verses, and it means to call on God for help. As a result of coming to God in faith, we have the privilege of coming to him with all our needs. What we often do instead is to trust our own resources to deal with any and all challenges we may face. We may eventually call on the Lord when we have run out of all other options. Yet the Bible says, **“You do not have, because you do not ask”** (James 4:2). God wants us to ask of him. Did Jesus not teach us in the Lord’s Prayer to pray for daily bread? What challenges are you currently facing right now? Have you been calling on the Lord about that?

We are to call on the Lord for big things, and also for little things. It deepens our love for God and fellowship with him when we come to him with everything. Here’s what Paul Miller writes about this in his book on prayer.

There are whole other categories, particularly material things, where it doesn’t occur to us to ask God. For example, we balk at praying, *God, I want a vacation home. Would you get me one?* We don’t mind *acting* selfishly, but *talking* selfishly is embarrassing. After all, we aren’t little children anymore. A vacation home is so beyond the purview of daily bread that it feels presumptuous to ask God for one. So what do we do instead of asking God for a vacation home? We look at our finances, talk to a realtor, and go buy one—all without seriously praying about the decision. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying buying a vacation house is inherently sinful. God delights in giving his children good gifts, including vacation homes. But he wants to be part of all the decisions we make. He wants our material needs to draw us into our soul needs. (*A Praying Life*, pp. 142-43).

I had a small need this week for which I took advantage of God’s invitation to call upon him. For several weeks, I’ve had some problems with our mortgage company because of an error they made. I won’t bore you with the details, but I had made multiple phone calls and sent several emails trying to resolve the problem. This past Thursday, as the situation was becoming more urgent, I made another attempt to get it resolved. I prayed for God’s help and then made yet another phone call. By God’s grace, the man who answered the call was actually quite helpful, and the problem was fixed. Some might say that it would have been fixed anyway. Of course, we can’t know that. But one thing I do know is that my heart was encouraged in being reminded yet again that I have a Father in heaven who loves me and invites me to call upon him.

## **CONCLUSION:**

If I could run the clock back and have that conversation again with my grandfather when he asked, “Isn’t it enough just to believe?” I would respond to him along the lines of this passage. I would ask him if he was confessing Jesus as Lord in his public life. And I would ask him if he was trusting God to solve his sin problem and make all things new for those who follow the risen Jesus.

Stott:

“It sets before us for salvation not the law but Christ, and assures us that unlike the law, Christ is not unattainable, but readily accessible.” Pp. 282-83

The confession “Jesus is Lord” is “the earliest and simplest of all Christian creeds.” P. 283

“Thus heart and mouth, inward belief and outward confession, belong essentially together.” P. 283

“The whole emphasis is on the close, ready, easy accessibility of Christ and his gospel.” P. 284

“It is a marvellous affirmation that through Christ there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Of course there is a fundamental distinction between those who seek righteousness by the law and those who seek it by faith.” P. 285

“Far from impoverishing us, we all receive his ‘unsearchable riches.’” P. 285

Thielman:

“No human action is necessary to effect Christ’s appearance, but instead Christ has come from heaven to earth at God’s initiative.” P. 492

“Paul’s point is that through the incarnation and resurrection of Christ God has already done everything necessary to provide righteousness and life for the believer.” P. 492

“Treacherous and difficult journeys to the realm of the dead were well known in the mythology of the first-century Greco-Roman world, not least in Vergil’s wildly popular *Aeneid* where, in book 6, Aeneas makes the arduous trek to the underworld to find his deceased father.” P. 493

“God has made avoiding his wrath simple. It merely involves accepting (in the fullest sense of that term) that Jesus is the creator and ruler of the universe and that through him god has reversed the curse of death that sin has brought to his creation.” P. 496

“The only human response the gospel requires is verbal confession and heartfelt conviction of its foundational claims.” P. 496

“The content of the verbal confession is that ‘the Lord is Jesus.’” P. 496

“The Roman public and imperial functionaries in the eastern empire had sometimes called the emperor ‘Lord’...In such a cultural context, the confession ‘the Lord is Jesus’ probably also meant that the ultimate loyalty of Christians lay with Jesus rather than with the emperor.” P. 496

“The verb ‘confess’ has a communal nuance. It does not merely refer to an internal intellectual acknowledgment that something is true but also to an identification of one’s self with others who believe the same truth.” P. 496

“With the resurrection of Jesus God had begun to reverse the effects of sin and recreate the world.” Pp. 496-97

Ambrosiaster captured the meaning precisely in the late fourth century:

On the day of judgment, when everything will be overthrown, then those who believe in Christ will rejoice, seeing it revealed to all that what they believed is true, and what was thought to be foolish was wise.” P. 498

“In the Old Testament, to call upon the name of the Lord was often to worship him exclusively in the midst of other people groups who called upon their own gods (cf., e.g. Ps 105:1; Isa 12:4; cf. Zech. 13:9).” P. 499

Doriani:

“Rabbi levi said: ‘If Israel kept the Sabbath properly even for one day, the Son of David would come. Why’ Because it is equivalent of all the commandments.” P. 358

“Resurrection’ “is a synecdoche for the whole of Jesus’ redemption, from incarnation to obedience, crucifixion, and resurrection.” P. 360

“We confess Christ in several ways. We confess christ in public worship by joining in and participating. We confess the faith in the sacraments, whenever we take communion or present a child or ourselves for baptism. We confess our faith by spending time with God’s people...Believers confess the Lord when we conduct ourselves with integrity at work, especially when it would be easy to compromise. We confess Jesus as Lord when we do justice and love mercy.” P. 362

“We know that ‘saved’ is an offensive term to secular people, who protest: ‘I don’t need to be saved. I am not your *project*.’ But ‘saved’ is an essential biblical term, and we should use it.” P. 363