

Ben Libby

Sermon

January 17th, 2nd Sunday after Epiphany

In the name of Jesus Christ, who came to redeem us from our sins so that we might become the children of God, Dear fellow Redeemed... Our sermon text this morning is taken from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 10, the first 13 verses.

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God on behalf of the Israelites is that they may be saved. 2 Indeed, I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but it is not consistent with knowledge. 3 Since they were ignorant of the righteousness from God and sought to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness from God. 4 For to everyone who believes, Christ is the end of the law, resulting in righteousness. 5 Indeed, Moses writes this about the righteousness that comes by the law: "The one who does these things will live by them." 6 But the righteousness that comes by faith speaks like this: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) 7 "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (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 word of faith that we are proclaiming. 9 Certainly, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and it is with the mouth that a person confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." 12 So there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all, who gives generously to all who call on him. 13 Yes, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

This is the Word of The LORD!!! The congregation may be seated...

Mercy, Grace, and peace our yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of God...

How does Christianity work? That is a simple question with a simple answer. You could answer that question quite simply, but it can get more complicated. Well, complicated is not the right word. There is a lot that goes into the faith in which we believe. The more you examine it, the more multifaceted the answers can become. And yet, at its true core, it is truly simple.

Certainly, we should all be able to explain how Christianity works. We should always **"be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you (1Pe 3:15 NKJ)"** So, how would you answer that question? Well, it really depends. What does it depend on? It depends on the person who is asking that question. How do they ask the question? What is their understanding? Where are they coming from?

Look at Jesus' interaction with the rich young man. **16 Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" 17 So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments." (Mat 19:16-17 NKJ)** Ok, now let's compare that with Paul and Silas' interaction with the Philippian Jailer: **And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" 31 So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." (Act 16:30-31 NKJ)**

The questions themselves are very similar. And yet, those are two very different answers. Jesus points the rich man to keep the commandments. Paul points the jailer to believe in Jesus. Does Paul disagree with

Jesus? Absolutely not! The reason for the differing answers is the person. The Jewish man thought he was righteous to begin with, and the Greek man was about to kill himself until Paul and Silas intervened. Jesus was trying to get the man to see that he couldn't keep the commandments so he would see that he needed help. The jailer had almost succumbed to despair. He gets instead pointed immediately to the Gospel to see that there was indeed no reason for desperation. Two different answers, but both were intended to see that salvation comes only through the Savior Jesus.

In our sermon text this morning, Paul gives a much fuller description of how Christianity works. Really, this whole Epistle is perhaps the fullest answer to that very fundamental question. He takes us all through it here. How does Christianity work? Well, you need to be righteous. You also need confession. But ultimately, you need to realize that it all comes through and from Christ! How does Christianity work? Through the work of Christ! And so, we pray - MAY THE WORDS OF MY MOUTH AND THE MEDITATIONS OF OUR HEARTS BE ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR SIGHT O LORD, OUR ROCK AND OUR REDEEMER, AMEN!!!-

I find Romans to be complex. Paul is describing throughout this book how Christianity does and does not work. He answers a simple question very thoroughly. That is why it is not always a speedy read.

In the previous chapter, Paul described how the Gentiles were saved. In our text, he compares that to what the typical Jewish struggles over Christianity. **Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God on behalf of the Israelites is that they may be saved. 2 Indeed, I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but it is not consistent with knowledge. 3 Since they were ignorant of the righteousness from God and sought to establish their own righteousness, they did not submit to the righteousness from God**

Have you ever admired someone's faith that was completely different than yours? I am not talking about comparing your faith to that of a fellow Christian.

Rather, have you ever admired someone's level of faith that was of a different religion?

Your doorbell rings. You open the door, perhaps expecting to see a package on your doorstep. Instead, you see two well-dressed individuals. They hand you a pamphlet asking you about God. These people took the time out of their lives to come to your door to talk to you about God! Is that not bold?

The organizations that typically do this are the Latter-day saints or the Jehovah's witnesses. I always try to engage with these people politely and get the Biblical truth across. I truly do admire these people. Their zeal is clear and it is admirable. I have been on the other side, I have passed out flyers promoting a VBS. It takes courage to stand up, ring a doorbell, and tell a stranger about your faith.

But, the admiration is soon soured into sadness once you understand exactly why they are there. Yes, they are very zealous about their faith. But, sadly they are trying to earn something. When we evangelize, we are trying to get the good news out there. When they do it, whether they realize it or not, they are trying to earn their way into heaven.

I think I feel the way about them the same way Paul felt about his fellow countrymen. Yes, both groups **"have a zeal for God"**. But the sad thing about their zeal is that **"it is not consistent with knowledge."**

Righteousness is the fundamental building block of all religions. If you boil them all down, they all come to a way to become righteous. This is true about us. That is what both of those questions that we looked at in the beginning centered around. "What must I do to be saved", or "What good thing shall I do so that I may inherit eternal life". Essentially, the question is, "How can I become righteous?"

The problem is that whenever you try to be righteous or try to do something to be saved, that is when you go in the completely wrong direction. Whenever that happens, you stop (as Paul says here) **submitting to the righteousness from God** and start **to establish your own righteousness**.

But Paul doesn't just leave the question open-ended. He answers it. **4 For to everyone who**

believes, Christ is the end of the law, resulting in righteousness.

Christianity also comes down to righteousness. But what makes us different is that it's not about MY righteousness. It's about CHRIST'S righteousness. If you believe in Jesus as your Lord, He is the end of the law. That is, He is your fulfillment of the law. We know that we could not do what the law demands. So, we look at what Jesus did on our behalf. He did do it, and when He died, His righteousness became ours. We have righteousness not because of what we have done, instead, we believe in Jesus. And as a result, we are declared to be righteous.

To get to this special status of "righteous", confession needs to be made: **9 Certainly, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**

If you read this verse by itself, you might come to the conclusion that the confession we make with our mouths is just as important as the belief that we have in our hearts. It seems to say that confession is right on par with belief. But really, the confession that we need to make is a bit larger than just the confession Paul is talking about here.

In our Church, we take pride in our confession. We literally included it in our synod name, the Church of the Lutheran CONFESSIO. And, of course, a large part of what we do in the service is simply that: we confess. But what does that all entail?

The word CONFESS means simply to say openly or to admit. But the word is used in two different ways. First, it is used especially for one's faith. That is what Paul is talking about in this verse. In our service, we reflect this every week by standing up and saying a creed. When we do that, we are not praying to God. We are simply openly stating truths. This is what we believe.

But it's also used as a part of repentance. We reflect this every week during our opening CONFESSIO and ABSOLUTION. We confess that we are sinful and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. During repentance, we have sorrow over

our sins, and we confess that we in fact are guilty of these sins. Then we are given (by faith) the assurance that we are indeed forgiven by God. In order to have righteousness, we need to have this admittance, this confession.

Paul says that if we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved. Is that to say that stating what we believe is as important as what we believe? NO!!! One of those things saves us. The other is simply us stating a fact that we know to be true by faith! If our confession that Jesus saved us is on par with the fact that Jesus has indeed saved us, then our belief isn't on Christ, it's on our own confession! And that is the same as work righteousness. The glory would then come from our own confession when really the glory should come from Christ's work alone.

Paul makes this clear from the preceding verses: **But the righteousness that comes by faith speaks like this: ... "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith that we are proclaiming.**

The righteousness of faith begins and ends with the Word of faith. Yes, Paul tells us that all who confess Jesus is Lord will be saved. But we are not saved by that confession. We are saved through faith in the word of faith. Paul says in 1 Corinthians **No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. (1Co 12:3 NKJ)** We first need the Holy Spirit and faith to understand that Jesus has saved us. Then, and only then, are we able to go on to say openly that Jesus has saved us. Paul goes on in his next letter to the Corinthians to say: **And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak (2Co 4:13 NKJ)** We believe first. Then we speak!

The act of confessing what we believe does not save us. Rather, it is a Gospel comfort and a promise that indeed we have already been saved! The only confession that needs to be made for salvation is the confession that we are sinners. This confession too does not save us. It is simply admitting the truth. The

truth is that we are doomed. The truth is that we deserved to be punished for our sins. The truth is that there is nothing we can do, we are dead already.

Let's say that you were presented with a similar situation as Paul was with the Jailer. Someone came up to you and said, "Hey, you're a Christian. You go to church. You would know. How does Christianity work? What must I do to be saved?" How would you respond?

You could respond the way Jesus did, **if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.** You could also respond as Paul did, **Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.** Either response could be appropriate, depending on who was asking you the question. When Jesus said what He said, He had the advantage of knowing how dependent the person who asked the question was on his own works. When Paul spoke like he did, he also could see how desperate the person was who asked him the question. What if you don't have either to fill the context? This is why a simple answer to this seemingly simple question is actually quite challenging. The answer really does depend. It doesn't depend because the truth is relative or subjective. It depends on where the person is spiritually.

A good way to answer that complexly simple question is simply like this: "What must you do to be saved? Nothing!" Of course, you wouldn't just leave it there, but that really is the answer to that question. The reason the answer is "nothing" is because the question itself is flawed. "What MUST I DO to be saved?" implies that there is something that can be done. Not true. The only thing WE CAN DO to be saved is to keep the law perfectly. That is why Jesus answers the way that He did. As Paul says here, **indeed, Moses writes this about the righteousness that comes by the law: "The one who does these things will live by them."** The problem with that is that we are dead already, and try as we might, we cannot live by the law. That is not to say that salvation is impossible. No, instead it really is simple. **Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.**

That's not anything we do! That is why the answer is nothing. It is "nothing" because salvation is completely an act outside of what we can do!

10 For it is with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and it is with the mouth that a person confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."

What the mouth speaks is joined in concert with what the heart believes. It can't be anything else, or else it's not saving faith. Whoever believes in Jesus shall be saved. Whoever believes in anything else won't.

And that, dear Christians is the true beauty about how Christianity works. It works in a way in which we no longer have to! No longer is it about what I have done, it's all about what Jesus did! It's not about how many times I have failed to do the right thing, or how many times I have failed and did the wrong thing. It is now about how Jesus always did the right thing and never ever did the wrong thing. It is about how He died for me! It is about how He transferred His righteousness to me on the cross and rose again so that might also. That's how Christianity works, through the work of Christ!

12 So there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord is Lord of all, who gives generously to all who call on him. 13 Yes, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Yes, there is great comfort and joy in knowing what we know by faith. The jailer and the rich man were the one and the same. Yes, they had different circumstances and reasons that brought them near to Christianity. But they had the same problem, one to which they did not know the answer. There wasn't anything either one could do. But, they had different reactions to the truth. One went away sad from Jesus and back to his great possessions. The other went away rejoicing and he and his family were baptized into the family of faith.

Our Lord Jesus is Lord of all. Look at how that point is emphasized here repeatedly. "the same Lord is

Lord of **all**, who gives generously to **all** who call on him. Yes, '**Everyone** who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" There are many different religions out there. They all deal with some form of righteousness and they all have the same answer to it. "There is something you can do to distinguish yourself. You can be righteous and become saved." The real truth is the opposite. We do nothing, and by doing nothing we are made righteous through His blood!

All of us here today have the same problem as the jailer and the rich man. We all can't do anything to save ourselves. When it comes to you, there truly is nothing to be done. But this is not hopeless, rather it's beautiful. We have all been led to believe by faith is that there is truly nothing left to do, Jesus did it all! There isn't anything we could do, nor should there be! Christ's work has done it all already. We have been saved and we are going to heaven. This is how Christianity works, all who call on the name of Christ SHALL BE SAVED! Grant this Lord, unto us all! AMEN!!!