

I really want you to (*please*) hear me on this!...

A seashore is a better place than the street because you need lots of room. At first it is better to run than to walk. You may have to try several times. It takes some skill, but it is easy to learn. Even young children can enjoy it. Birds seldom get too close. If there are no snags it can be very peaceful.

Do you understand what I am saying...? ... Some of you may be thinking that I've "lost all my marbles." "It doesn't make any sense..."

Well... yes... it does. But only when you have context. Without any perspective to frame the sentences... that paragraph sounds like utter gibberish.

Now let me read it again... but before I do... (this time) I will provide some context — (just a single word... as your interpretive key.) ... The one word is kite. ... Now see if it makes sense:

A seashore is a better place than the street because you need lots of room. At first it is better to run than to walk. You may have to try several times. It takes some skill, but it is easy to learn. Even young children can enjoy it. Birds seldom get too close. If there are no snags it can be very peaceful.

The context helps the paragraph make sense. In the same way... when it comes to our reading the Bible - it is anyone's guess as to what a passage actually means... unless you have the context. Once you know the background... all of the details start to fall into place.

I am excited to preach on our passage today... because I get to do a little teaching about proper Bible study. ... We have before us... a very familiar passage of Scripture. Many of us have heard many sermons preached from it. ... But if your experience has been anything like mine – context has been ignored – and the sermons I have heard... (***all***) proclaimed a

message that was not even close to the message that Paul originally wrote... ... Even the commentaries that I read to prepare for today's message – (nearly every one of them) – ignored the context and went on to emphasize an assumed message. ... They said good stuff... It was all worthy of declaring from a pulpit... But I think that it is always safer to stick with the message that the original author actually wrote (in this case – the Apostle Paul.)

So I get to do a little teaching about understanding our Bible... before we embark on our passage in Romans for today. I will begin by giving you some common unhelpful ways to read and study God's Word. (Here are 4 wrong approaches to Bible study):

- #1. **The Xanax Approach**. Feel anxious? Read Philippians 4:6. ... Feel tired? Read Matthew 11:28. ... (You see) The Xanax Approach treats the Bible as if it exists to make us feel better. (It assumes that Bible study is about finding comfort for my issues.) ... The problem with this approach... is that I ask how the Bible can serve me... rather than how I can serve the God it proclaims.
- #2. **The Pinball Approach**. Lacking a reference or any guidance on what to read... I read whatever Scripture verse I happen to turn to next... ricocheting from one passage to the next. ... But the Pinball Approach gives no thought to the culture... history... authorship... or original intent of the passage.
- #3. **The Magic 8 Ball Approach**. Remember the Magic 8 Ball? You just shake it and wait until it provides a clear answer to your most

difficult questions. But the Bible isn't magical and its primary function is to transform us rather than to answer our most pressing questions.

- #4. **The Personal Shopper Approach**. We don't actually study the Bible; rather... we shop around for Bible teachers or preachers who suit our tastes. ... Much like the Pinball Approach... we ricochet from teacher to teacher... and topic to topic ...without getting the tools to study God's Word for ourselves.
- #5. **The Jack Sprat Approach**. In the English nursery rhyme... the character Jack Sprat "*could eat no fat.*" ... We take this approach when we're picky eaters who refuse to digest certain parts of the Bible. ... But all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable. We need to diligently peruse answers to verses that trouble us. (*"Am I understanding it correctly... or if I am... why am I so upset by it?"*)

With each of these unhelpful ways to study the Bible... one thing seems to be common to them all. It is that they disregard... overlook... or ignore the context. ... We had a saying when I was in seminary: "Context is King!" ... (Let it rule your understanding.) ... So I am a little shocked that context is so often ignored when it comes to our passage in Romans today.

In seminary... we had it drilled into us in our Bible interpretation class... that your first concern when reading a Bible passage is to find out what the human author (himself) meant... by his own words. That is the place to start. ... It is **foundational**(!)... because if your interpretation - and (later) your application - does not correspond with what the author meant by his own words... then you had better **not** declare "*Thus says the Lord...*" It will not be God's words... it will only be **your own**.

One of my professors (Haddon Robinson) said: “*The people involved in the public relations department of the church always make Bible study sound as though it is easy. It is not. It takes a great deal of effort to understand this text, and even more to understand how it applies to our lives.*”

So... use the notes in your Bibles... Use whatever Bible resources that you have available to you. ... Do your best to start with an understanding of “*What did the author mean – when he wrote this?*”

Now... we have come this morning to Romans 10... starting with verse 14... (where we left off last week.) ... Let me just read a little bit from our passage today... and if you have been in the church for very long... the chances are that you will recall a sermon or some teaching about it. ... It is often used as a text – encouraging us to send out missionaries... which is a very important task of the church. (I don’t want anyone to think that I am discounting our need to be mission focused. I am passionate that it is the reason for our existing as a church.) But this is not the topic of these verses.

Romans 10:14-17

These verses are not encouraging us to send out missionaries. ... Rather... they are asserting that God has already done so. ... (I think that I need to repeat that...) These verses are not encouraging us to send out missionaries - they are asserting that God has already done so.

... [P A U S E] ...

If we do not disregard the context... we will see that these verses teach that God has sent His Jewish prophets with specific revelation... and God has given a general revelation through His created order of the heavens

and earth... and (more recently)... God has sent people like Paul and the other apostles... who have preached the good news. ... This passage is declaring: Israel HAS HEARD the good news - but FAILED to believe it. ... This is Paul's clear message here... when we take into consideration the context... both BEFORE and AFTER these verses - that look like they are calling for us to send out more missionaries..

(You see)... We are not free to make a passage mean whatever is the first thing to pop into our mind (or whatever we happen to want it to mean) – even if that message is as good and necessary as “the need for missions.” ... We have to consider what Paul has written (immediately) before these verses... and what is written (immediately) after them. Remember: “Context is king!”

Now in our passage today... we have both an immediate context (verse by verse) and a broader context (chapter by chapter) that we need to be consistent with... in our understanding and application. ... So going back into Romans chapter 9... where Paul initiated a discussion about the Jewish nation rejecting Jesus (their Messiah)... we should acknowledge that Paul has meticulously been answering a series of anticipated questions... and all of them relate to this over-all question: “*Did God fail?*”

Paul is still giving his answer that: “*The Jew rejected their Messiah but God has not failed*”... through a series of related questions... and he continues to do so (*here*) in chapter 10... and... all the way through chapter 11.

Paul has been carrying-on an imaginary conversation with his readers. He anticipates them having one objection after another... and he has been answering them - before - his readers can raise their protests.

So he writes out the questions that he anticipates... and then proceeds to answer them. Rom 9:6 – “*it is not as if the Word of God has failed*”. Then... after Paul defend this statement by writing about **election** (God choosing some but bypassing others)... he easily imagined opposition. Rom. 9:14 - “*Is there injustice on God’s part?*”; and also Romans 9:19 – “*You will say to me, ‘why does He then still find fault? For who can resist His will?’*” (We covered all of this when we were in chapter 9)

Chapter 10 is more of the same – and this includes today’s passage. We are in the middle of Paul arguing that “*God did **not** fail*”) ... and Paul’s method of arguing this... has **not** changed. (He is still raising related objections... and then answering them.) ... (So now – get **this**...) - Romans 10:14-17... (which are often interpreted as showing the need for missions)... are actually **more of Paul’s anticipated OBJECTIONS** from his readers.

Now (again) please understand... I would **love** to be preaching to you a message about the need for missions! It is a dire **need**. Too many churches spend far too much on **themselves**... and far too little on **missions**. ... We so easily turn inward and become preoccupied with **our** problems and potential... neglecting the millions who have never heard the Gospel. ... And more and more churches are losing their missionary zeal... because they have caved-in to the flood of postmodern agitation ... and they are afraid of seeming “*intolerant*.”

But no matter what - **you** or **I** - may prefer... I am going to stay within the context of our passage. ... So pick-up with me (here) with what **is** the immediate context for Romans 10:14-15... (which I read earlier.)

Romans 10:13

Just as Paul has been doing all along... the two questions that are asked in the very next verses (Romans 10:14-15) are Paul's anticipated objections to what he wrote in verse 13.

Romans 10:14

“Paul... this can't be true that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved... because such a large part of the nation has rejected Jesus...” “Uh – Hel-lo-**oh!** ... How will they **call on him**... in whom they have **not believed**????” ... “Furthermore... Paul... what you just said is ridiculous because no one can believe in a being of whom they have never heard...”

Now this is the underpinning to all of the objections that we see in today's passage – “No one can believe in a being of whom they have never heard... and most haven't” **That point** is going to be repeated a few times... as different angles of this very same obstacle. ... For example... we see it expressed in the next verse.

Romans 10:15

The angle of the objection (here) was this: “Men could not believe unless the message was sent to them - and God has not actually sent it to all men. It cannot therefore be just... to make eternal life depend on so impracticable a thing as faith... since men have not been given the **means** of believing...”

The second part of verse 15 is a quote from Isaiah 52:7. ... It contends why God **could not possibly** have sent Paul's message to the Jews.

The image in Isaiah is that of a herald... seen at first as leaping or running on a distant hill when he first comes in sight... He has reports of joy from a field of battle... or from a distant land.

The appearance of such a man to those who were at war... would be an image full of gladness and joy. (*"The battle is over! Our side has won!!!"*) ... Such heralds are regarded as overwhelmingly attractive. Even something as disgusting as their dusty (and probably *bloodied*) FEET are delightful. ... ("Yeah... and their breath stinks too. But even *that* is wonderful!")

O.K. Perhaps I went over-board with *the breath comment*. ... But the point is this... The true messenger... and message from God... will be regarded with deep interest... and it will naturally produce overwhelming joy - in even the most agitated soul! ... They will be generously received – ***not*** rejected!

"So... Paul..." (he hears his objectors say)... *"If God were to send one of these messengers with what you tell us is God's message – we would all **know**. Because we would all be jumping for joy. ... Messengers from **God** get this kind of a reaction. ... But **that** has not happened. Your message has **not** brought this response. ... **We have not heard from God!!!"***

Therefore... Paul responds to this skepticism with the next verse.

Romans 10:16

"Hearing is not all that is needed." A response of joy to our message... only comes - *if it is obeyed*. ... So Paul adds... *"But they have not all obeyed the gospel..."* ... And then... (watch this!) ... Paul mentions someone who

they would recognize as a definite herald of God. Look how Isaiah's message was received. ... *“For Isaiah says ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’”*

This quote from Isaiah (a well-recognized messenger of God) has two meanings. It originally means the doctrine which Isaiah delivered about the Messiah was not believed... and implies that the same thing would occur when the Messiah would actually come. ... This quote is from Isaiah 53:1. It opens the well-known chapter of prophecy about the coming Messiah. *“When He comes... no one will believe our report about Him...”*

So... (yes!) the nation of Israel did not jump for joy. But this was – EXACTLY- as it has been prophesied.”

Paul has answered (once again) another anticipated objection. But here is (yet) one more angle.

Romans 10:17

The objector in Paul's mind asserts: *“Yes! Yes! That is exactly our point, Paul. ... According to what Isaiah is saying... a message is indeed necessary (‘faith comes by hearing... and hearing by divine message’). It could not be right... therefore... to condemn those who had not obeyed the gospel... because they have not heard it... and hence it is not right to make salvation dependent on a condition which was (by the arrangement of God)... put beyond their ability.”*

(Before we go any further)... One thing we should all notice... is that Paul does not deny the truth that is brought forth in verse 17... *“Faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of Christ.”* I think (as I try to follow the

context... especially what Paul writes next... in verse 18)... that Paul expressed something that is **true** here... in his anticipation that his objectors might twist it... by adding their *persistent* assumption to it: that the Gospel has **NOT** been adequately made known!

So... Paul (with verse 18) will now (finally) address this pesky little assumption that has been behind all of these objections.

Romans 10:18

“Is it really true that they have not heard?” ... Paul's answer is that they *have* heard it. He establishes this truth by quoting Psalm 19:4. Let's turn our attention to this (very familiar) Psalm for just a moment...

Psalm 19:1-4 (ESV)

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. ² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. ⁴ Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun,

Paul has used the argument that God has revealed His truth through His creation ALREADY in this very letter to the Romans. In chapter one... he wrote that every man (not just the Jews) are without an excuse – because the orderliness of His creation testifies of Him. Earlier... here in Romans... Paul has made the point that when a person responds to whatever amount of general revelation about God that he has... God will give more revelation about Himself. (The more a person responds... and seeks God... the more revelation he gets.) The problem is... (as Paul already wrote... and will say

again...) is that man does not want to know God. He is more interested in making a god of his own choosing.

Israel heard... but she would not heed.

OK... so... having demonstrated that Israel heard... perhaps they did not understand? General revelation from nature is too general. Anyone could miss it. ... So Paul goes there next...

Romans 10:19-20

I love Paul's response here. But it takes a little thought to understand it. ... Did the Jews understand the Gospel? Yes. They did... because they were provoked to jealousy when the Gentiles (upon whom they had often looked disapprovingly) believed it.

(Think about it.) ... If Paul's countrymen did not understand the gospel of salvation by grace through the work of Christ — if it was utter foolishness to them — why would they have had such an emotional reaction when it was proclaimed among the Gentiles? ... It would have been just another example of Gentile foolishness in religious matters. "*Who cares what the Gentiles believe?*" they would say. "*Let them believe anything they like, as long as we have our Judaism, which (as we know) is superior in every way.*"

But that was not the reaction Paul was seeing. Instead of detached indifference and smug superiority... there was jealousy and anger on the Jews' part. (Oh Yeah!... they understood... alright!) They understood that "their God" was showing His favor on the Gentiles. ... (And) This was

happening – just the way Moses and Isaiah said it would. ... Paul quotes from their two most esteemed messengers from God (Moses... in Deuteronomy 32:21... and Isaiah... in Isaiah 65:1.) ... Do you see why I said that “*I love Paul’s response*” to this one? ... But I can’t say that I love (as much) the way today’s passage ends. It has a rather sobering conclusion.

Romans 10:21

I am going to close today with some of the words James Montgomery Boice used to close the section of his commentary... with this verse.

This is a moving statement... because it spells out the nature of God's love... in contrast to the disobedient and obstinate rejection of the love of God by human beings. ... The first part... the part that spells out the nature of God's love... teaches at least two things about it.

(1.) **It is continuous**. The day of grace has not ended... and it will not end until Jesus returns the final time for judgment.

I want you to think of this personally... especially if you have not yet come to Jesus Christ as your Savior. ... The day of God's grace has been continuous with you... too.

How many entreaties to believe on Jesus Christ have you heard? ... How many sermons have you sat through? ... If you have been attending this church (or any good evangelical church) for any length of time... I know you have heard the gospel. ... Think how continuous and long-suffering the grace of God is. ... And remember this: If you reject the gospel... each

entreaty... each warning... and each sermon... will rise up to render you **without excuse** at the day of God's judgment. ... If your destiny is not Heaven... no one will be responsible for it - but yourself.

(1.) **It is continuous**. (2.) **It is compassionate**. The truth that it is filled with passion for you... is clearly taught in this text. We have here the picture of the constantly outstretched hands of God. This is meant to portray compassion. ... It is the posture of a parent reaching out to a crying child.... It is the gesture of Jesus... Who reached out to us from the cross.

When Jesus died on that cross... God did something that should have profoundly shaken every Jew who knew of it. ... When Jesus died... God tore the great veil of the Jerusalem temple in two. ... This was the veil separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place... and for centuries it had barred the way to God... on the grounds that sinful men and women could not simply barge-in upon God's holiness.

Now the veil was torn... signifying that the way to God was open. No longer was it necessary to be a Jew to enter the outer temple courts... or a priest to enter the temple itself... or the high priest to enter the Most Holy Place. Because of Jesus' death... the way was open... and anyone — Gentiles as well as Jews... women as well as men... slaves as well as free-born people — **anyone could come to God through Him**.

But what did the Jews do? ... They just sewed the torn veil of the temple back together and went on with their exclusively Jewish worship. ... They rejected the witness of those who had seen the risen Lord... explaining the empty tomb as a theft and deception on the part of the disciples... and

continued their sacrificial system... until the temple was at last destroyed by the Romans... in 70 A.D.

But it is no different today. ... The unregenerate world is not interested in the gospel. ... And (if the truth is told)... there are many apparent “Christians” who do not seem to be very interested in it - either.

They have little (or no) care to have God’s Word to nourish their withered souls. They do not study their Bibles. They do not read Christian books. ... Their minds are flabby... and so are their spiritual muscles. They live for themselves. ... And they know what they are doing. They are saying “*No thanks*” to those outstretched arms of God.

But be warned. If what I have said describes you... (if you have not yet come to Christ and are resisting Him)... know that one day those outstretched hands of God will become the hands of His judgment.

Hebrews 10:31 (ESV)

³¹ *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

This current day of grace has not ended. ... But it will... when Jesus returns... which all signs seem to indicate is very immanent.

My intent is not *as much* to scare you... as it is for you to see God’s compassion for you right now. Don’t be indifferent to it. ... Do not reject it. If you haven’t already... respond to it today. Reach up to Him in prayer... and receive His love and forgiveness. Allow Him to be Master of your life... from this day forward!