

Romans 10:16-21

Have You Believed the Word of Christ?

Jesus spoke many parables in the Gospels

- A parable is simply an earthly analogy designed to teach a spiritual lesson or truth

Jesus' parables utilized many different elements of nature and life

- Vines and branches
- People
- Money
- Sheep
- Wedding feasts

Listen to a parable that Jesus told

- Listen to see what Jesus was trying to emphasize

“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who **PLANTED A VINEYARD AND PUT A WALL AROUND IT AND DUG A WINE PRESS IN IT, AND BUILT A TOWER**, and rented it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey. And when the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. And the vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and seize his inheritance.’ And they took him, and threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers?”

They said to Him, “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers, who will pay him the proceeds at the *proper* seasons.” Jesus said to them, “Did you never read in the Scriptures, ‘**THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone; THIS CAME ABOUT FROM THE LORD, AND IT IS MARVELOUS IN OUR EYES**’? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it. And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.” And when the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them. And when they sought to seize Him, they feared the multitudes, because they held Him to be a prophet.” (Mt 21:33-46)

Jesus was targeting the Jews

- Specifically, the unbelieving Jews who were trying to kill Him

God had sent many prophets to the nation Israel

- But unbelieving Jews had mistreated them
- Some prophets were killed

Even God's own Son, Jesus, had come to bear witness to the Jews of the truth of God

- Yet the unbelieving Jews mistreated Him, and ultimately crucified Him

This morning, as we finish Romans 10, we will see this same disobedient attitude in the minds of many unbelieving Jews

Let's read Romans 10:16-21

The apostle Paul, in the final verses of Romans 10, gives three (3) exhortations to the Jews

- Required obedience (10:16-17)
- Refuted objections (10:18-20)
- Rejected opportunities (10:21)

I. Required obedience (10:16-17)

16 However, they did not all heed the glad tidings:

Last week, we saw how the apostle Paul described the process whereby one comes to call upon the Lord

- In order to call upon the Lord, one must believe
- In order to believe in the Lord, one must hear
- In order to hear, one must have the Word preached
- In order to have the Word preached, one must be sent

Paul's point was not merely to give a theological list

- His goal was to indict the Jewish people for their willful rebellion and rejection of the Messiah

If God had not sent messengers, they wouldn't have had the Word preached to them

- If they hadn't had the Word preached, they couldn't have heard
- If they hadn't heard, they couldn't have believed
- If they hadn't believed, they couldn't have called upon the Lord

But all of this was contingent upon the assumption that God had not sent messengers to the Jews

- Had He?

Of course God had sent messengers to Israel

- Countless messengers
- Countless prophets
- Countless witnesses
- Countless preachers

Verse 15 ends with such a note of joy and excitement, citing Isaiah 52:7, "**HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS!**"

- What a blessing it was for the Jewish people to be told that they would no longer be in captivity
- Good news!

One born-again Jewish author has written this, "[Israel should have viewed the feet of the men and women who brought them the message of Messiah as beautiful and bearers of good news. Instead the Israelites attacked the messengers and rejected the message.](#)"¹

Dear friend, it is fabulous when God uses your feet to take your body to use your voice to announce the Good News to unbelievers today

- We have the best news
- Sinners don't have to remain in captivity to sin!

But Paul goes from this pinnacle of praise in verse 15 to the valley of sorrow in verse 16

- Listen to his words, "**However, they did not all heed the glad tidings**"

¹ Steven A. Kreloff, *God's Plan for Israel*, 66.

Our English word “**however**” is actually the strongest possible way to negate a Greek statement

- The contrast is very apparent

Let’s go back to the immediate context of Isaiah

- God was announcing that His people could return to their homeland
- They wouldn’t be held in captivity any longer

Can you imagine someone hearing this news and thinking, “No thanks. I like it here in Babylon!”

- Who would possibly reject the news that they could return home and be released from the captivity?

Even more saddening is when sinners reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ

- Choosing bondage to sin over release and forgiveness
- Choosing sin over Christ
- Choosing death over life

The problem lies not with the message

- The problem lies in the human heart

The word translated “**heed**” is actually a very intensive word implying obedience²

- It should be translated, “They did not all obey the glad tidings”

Again, we are reminded that the call to believe is a call to submit

- The acceptance of Christ as Savior is also an acceptance of Him as Lord

I was taught early on that it was not necessary to submit to Christ as Lord

- I thought that when I became older and more mature, then it would be appropriate to call upon Him as Lord

But God opened my eyes to see that this was counter to the Biblical teaching

- The call to believe was, in fact, a call to submit to the authority and sovereignty of God

for Isaiah says, “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?”

Paul cites Isaiah once again here in verse 16

- This time, he cites Isaiah 53:1

This should be a familiar passage to us

- It chronicles the Suffering Servant

Paul uses Isaiah’s question as his own, “**LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?**”

As Paul contemplates the Jewish response to the Gospel, he has to ask, “**who has believed our report?**”

- The overwhelming response had been one of rejection

That isn’t to say that all had rejected Christ

- Undoubtedly, there were some who had believed

² Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 391.

Paul had already stated in Romans 9:27, “**Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved**”

- Only the “**remnant**” will be saved
- A very small number when compared to the majority

This question of Isaiah has been repeated on the lips of many faithful preachers

- At various times during Church history, faithful expositors have asked, “Is there anyone listening? Does anyone believe the message?”

700 years before Christ was born, the prophet Isaiah predicted that the nation of Israel would not believe the Good News of the suffering Messiah

- “**He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him**” (John 1:11)
- “**But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name**” (John 1:12)

The only other time that Isaiah 53:1 is quoted is in John 12:38³

- Jesus quotes this verse of Himself to refer to the Jewish unbelief around Him

Only a strong belief in God’s sovereignty and election can sustain and encourage men and women to be faithful in proclaiming the Gospel

- God has chosen some to be saved
- And God will use the Word to bring the elect to faith

17 So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

Romans 10:17 is another very familiar passage that is oftentimes quoted

- “**So faith *comes* from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ**”

The epistle of Romans is about how sinners can have a righteous standing with God

- The only way is for a sinner to be justified by faith alone

But what is the source of saving faith?

- God Himself
- It is a gift from Him

God uses faithful preaching of the Word of God to awaken sinners to their need of Himself

- He then bestows the gift of faith upon those who realize their wretched situation apart from Him

Actually, our English Bibles have done us a great disservice

- The word in verse 16 for “**report**” and the word in verse 17 for “**hearing**” are actually all the same Greek word
- They are translated differently for some reason

Let’s backtrack and review just briefly

The content of saving faith is the agreement to the true identity of Jesus Christ (10:9-10)

- His Lordship
- His resurrection from the dead

³ F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale NT Commentaries, Romans*, 196.

There is no distinction within saving faith

- Unbelieving Jews and unbelieving Gentiles both need the same message of salvation
- They need the same Lord and Savior

The highway on which saving faith arrives to us is as follows

- We must call upon Him, but we must first believe
- We must believe, but we must first hear
- We must hear, but we must first have the Word preached
- The Word must be preached, but messengers must be sent

God grants faith through the proclaimed Word

- He has established preaching (both public and private) as the means whereby sinners are converted

Yet how sad it is that the sign of the times is to tone down the preaching

- Focusing more on music than preaching
- Focusing more on feeling than thinking

Faith is given when the Word is preached

- But not just any Word

The true, saving message is “the word of Christ”

- The message about the Christ

Some of your English translations have “the word of God”

- But earlier and more accurate copies of the Greek text have been found
- These earlier copies have “Christ” rather than “God”

This is why CBC places such a high emphasis and priority on the preaching of the Word of God

- This is why my main responsibility during the week is not to administrate
- But rather to prepare for the public preaching of the Word of God

Part of my reasoning is found here in verse 17, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ”

- When I preach, that God might save the unbelieving
- When I preach, that God might sanctify the believing

My goal is to proclaim the Word of God

- As accurately as I can
- As passionately as I can
- As clearly as I can

This verse should be a tremendous encouragement and reminder in the area of evangelism⁴

- Our responsibility is not to “win” a convert
- Our responsibility is to be faithful to proclaim the Gospel accurately

We can appeal to them to come to faith in Christ

- But we can't change that person's heart
- Only God can do that

⁴ John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur NT Commentary, Romans 9-16*, 87.

But merely hearing the Word of God will not suffice

- Because many people hear the Word without choosing to obey and heed the Word

What Paul envisions here is the attitude of a humble, obedient response to the proclaimed message

- The Word must be received by faith⁵

Paul is reminding the Jews of required obedience

- **But there is a second reminder found in verses 18-20**

II. Refuted objections (10:18-20)

After making such a strong statement of God's blessing upon true, Biblical preaching, the apostle Paul anticipates some objections

- Being a Jew himself, he may have had these same objections with Christianity
- No doubt in his public ministry as an apostle, Paul had encountered numerous Jews who voiced their concerns and issues

Specifically, there are two (2) primary objections that Paul discusses

A. First objection (10:18)

18 But I say, surely they have never heard, have they?

This first objection is centered around the assumption that Israel had not "**heard**"

- This argument would say, "If we didn't hear, then God can't hold us responsible!"

Is this true?

- Did Israel hear?

Indeed they have: "THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH, AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD."

To prove his point that the Jews had heard the Gospel, Paul goes to a rather unusual passage

- Psalm 19:4
- Let's turn to Psalm 19

This is a psalm that extols the beauty and witness of creation

- Let's read the first four verses

Verses 1-6 speak of general revelation

- Creation

Verses 7-14 speak of special revelation

- The Scriptures

⁵ Alan F. Johnson, *Everyman's Bible Commentary, Romans*, 185.

So why would Paul, in Romans 10, use a passage that speaks of general revelation to support his claim that the Gospel message had gone forth?

- Did Paul believe that the Gospel could be seen in creation?

If the Gospel could be seen by looking at creation, then there would be no need for preachers, would there?

- Certainly not

If the Gospel could be seen by looking at creation, then there would be no need for the written revelation, would it?

- Certainly not

Even in Psalm 19, we see very clearly that David speaks of creation first

- But then what does he discuss?
- The Law of God!

Listen to what David says about God's written revelation (as opposed to general revelation)

- 7 – “The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.”
- 8 – “The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.”
- 9 – “The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.”

This is because God's Word can do what creation cannot

- God's Word can save
- Creation can't

Creation can tell you that there is a god

- But nothing about His name
- Nothing specific about His nature
- Nothing about the Gospel

Paul is referencing Psalm 19:4 in a very straightforward manner

- Creation is universal
- Everyone has access to creation

General revelation shows that there is a god

- Even though it is limited in scope, if one rejects creation, then that person stands responsible before God

The apostle Paul has already spoken of this in the first chapter of Romans, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.” (Rom 1:20-21)

Just like God has used the witness of creation, so He uses the witness of His written revelation

- Paul could say that for the Jews, the knowledge of God's Word was as evident as the stars in the sky

No Jew could claim ignorance of God's Word!

- That would be like someone saying, “I didn't know there were any stars in the sky!”

Certainly not every person had heard the Gospel

- We find that later in Romans, the apostle Paul had a desire to go to Spain in order to proclaim the Gospel there⁶

This is why we are still sending missionaries to the ends of the Earth

- Some have never heard, so they can't believe until they hear
- Others have heard, but they need to hear again so they can believe

B. Second objection (10:19-20)

19 But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they?

This second objection seeks to absolve Israel based on a lack of understanding

- Was the message clear enough for Israel to understand?

To prove his point that the Jews had known, Paul appeals to two witnesses

- Moses
- And Isaiah

That may not sound important to you

- But Paul's quotations are very carefully selected

Jesus would frequently use the phrase, "**the Law and the Prophets**" as a way of referring to the entire Old Testament (Mt 5:17; 7:12; 22:40; Lk 16:16; 24:44; John 1:45)

What do we find Paul doing here in Romans 10:19-20?

- He appeals to Moses, representing the Law
- He appeals to Isaiah, representing the Prophets

In other words, Paul says, the entire Old Testament – the Jewish Scriptures – bear consistent witness to the truth of which Paul speaks

- The Jews could not claim ignorance

Stubborn pride caused them to remain blinded to their true, spiritual condition

We may overlook the fact that Paul specifically identifies his target audience, "**surely Israel did not know, did they?**"

- This is Israel
- The national people of God!

These are the people of whom Paul wrote, "**who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.**" (Rom 9:4-5)

⁶ Bruce, 197.

At the first Moses says, "I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU."

The quotation from Moses is pulled from Deuteronomy 32:21

- This is the Song of Moses

For 43 verses, Moses recounts the history of Israel

- God's faithfulness
- Israel's unfaithfulness

The nation of Israel had been unfaithful to the LORD in many ways

- But their idolatry was especially pointed out⁷

The wordplay here may be missed

- So let's explain it

Here is the Text of Deuteronomy 32:21, "They have made Me jealous with *what* is not God; they have provoked Me to anger with their idols. So I will make them jealous with *those who* are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation"

Idolatry is classified as "what is not god"

- Idols are not real gods
- They are man-made objects of worship

Israel made God jealous by a "no god"

- So God would make Israel jealous by a "no people"

In the mind of a typical Jew during the Old Testament, Gentiles were a "no-nation"

- They weren't part of the chosen nation of Israel
- They were viewed as being outsiders
- They were not given the immense privileges that Israel enjoyed

Back in Romans 9, Paul alluded to the prophecy of Hosea

- "I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, 'MY PEOPLE,' AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, 'BELOVED.' AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, 'YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE,' THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD." (9:25-26)

This dramatic reversal was predicted in Hosea

- But it was hinted at earlier on by Moses himself

The Jews prided themselves on their knowledge of the Law, the Torah

- But Paul goes back to the Torah itself and shows them that they were ignorant of God's own plan

At times, God would use the Gentiles to punish Israel

- The Babylonians
- The Assyrians

⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *NICNT, Romans*, 668.

But in this case, God would use Gentiles to bring about another desire effect

- That of salvation

Gentiles would be used to make the Jews “jealous”

- That may be strange language for us, but God’s ways are always perfect

In blessing the Gentiles, God would be showing the Jews what they missed out on

- Some of the Jews would ask themselves, “Why isn’t God blessing me with salvation? What’s going on?”

Paul’s point is subtle, but serious

- If the Gentiles – here classified as “without understanding” – can come to know God, then the Jews had no excuse

The Gentiles were not very theologically astute

- They were known as being polygamous
- Worshipping many gods

Yet God chose to draw them to Himself, regardless of their background

- God doesn’t only save the supposedly moral
- He can save those who are wretched and degenerate

I would like to bring up a point of application

- Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles
- God was using him to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, many of whom were responding favorably

Yet Paul doesn’t rely on his own experience in talking to the Jews

- Paul relies on Scripture⁸

I have had shared various theological truths with people before, only for them to say something like, “But I have a friend who...”

- They are trying to use experience – either their own or someone else’s – as evidence to interpret Scripture

Paul doesn’t resort to that kind of reasoning

- Even though this portion of the Old Testament was coming true – the Gentiles were coming to faith in the Messiah – Paul chose to rely on the Scriptures

The warning for us is that we not use experience in the place of Scripture

- Experience is not infallible, but Scripture is
- Experience is not verifiable, but Scripture is
- Experience is not inerrant, but Scripture is

20 And Isaiah is very bold and says,

As if Moses wasn’t enough of a witness, Paul calls Isaiah to the witness stand

- Romans 10:20 quotes Isaiah 65:1
- Romans 10:21 quotes Isaiah 65:2

⁸ C.E.B. Cranfield, *ICC, Romans 9-16*, 539.

For Paul to say that Isaiah was “bold” is to say that his message was daring

- It “pushed the envelope” of the Jewish mindset

“I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO SOUGHT ME NOT, I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME.”

Paul again uses the language of election to prove his case

- God speaks through Isaiah, saying, “I was found by those who sought me not”

Can God not bestow salvation on whom He chooses?

- Does the Potter not have a right over the clay?

The natural unbeliever does not seek God on his own initiative

- God must begin that work

Israel was a nation that had sought God

- They had asked for a relationship with God

But Israel went about this relationship with God the wrong way

- They thought it was through the Law or their lineage that a righteous standing with God would be obtained

The Gentiles, on the other hand, had not sought God

- They had not asked to have a relationship with God

Yet God allowed the Gentiles to be saved!

- Many of the Jews, however, rejected the message
- In doing so, they rejected Christ Himself

Paul has discussed two exhortation thus far

- **Required obedience (10:16-17)**
- **Refuted objections (10:18-20)**

III. Rejected opportunities (10:21)

21 But as for Israel He says,

Paul quotes Isaiah 65:2 here in Romans 10:21

“ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE.”

Many Jews thought that they were spiritually secure

- Because of their knowledge of the Torah
- Because of their physical lineage

But verse 21 should dispel all such myths

- God is shown to have his arms opened wide to the Jews
- Yet they rejected Him

“God is the one who is seeking, reaching out to his people continually with a plea that Israel return to him in loving obedience, only to be rebuffed”⁹

- The very ones who should have been most receptive were, in fact, the least receptive

One can easily see the patient nature of God in extending multiple opportunities to the Jewish people

- “all the day long” – He is longsuffering
- “stretched out My hands” – loving, caring, compassionate

Israel is described as being both “disobedient and obstinate”

- Not kind words
- But honest words

One might ask, “How does God stretch out His hands?”

- I would suggest that one way in which He does this is by constantly allowing the messengers of His Word to proclaim the Gospel

When the word of faith is proclaimed, it is as if God were stretching out His hands, inviting sinners to Himself¹⁰

- To receive the Gospel is to draw near to God’s outstretched arms
- To reject the Gospel is to turn away from God’s outstretched arms

Jesus told a story about a man who had two sons

- We oftentimes refer to the younger son as the “prodigal son”

We know the story

- The younger man asks for his inheritance
- He leaves his father’s home and wastes all of his money

Then the younger man comes to his senses

- He returns home, asking his father for forgiveness
- He expected to be treated merely as a servant

But as he is returning home, the father ran to meet him

- The father embraced his son, hugging him and kissing him

The father had his servants bring a robe, a ring, and sandals for his son

- They prepared a luxurious meal

But the older son was furious

- He was upset that his father so quickly took his younger brother back into the family
- And was spoiling him with the money that really belonged to him

This story is not really about the younger son

- It is a story designed to focus on the older son

⁹ Everett F. Harrison, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Romans*, 115.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans*, 407.

You see, at the beginning of that chapter, Jesus had identified His target audience

- “Now all the tax-gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. And both the Pharisees and the scribes *began* to grumble, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them’” (Lk 15:1-2)

The Jews were incensed that Jesus would hang around sinners, tax collectors, and prostitutes

- They even labeled Jesus as a friend of sinners

Here in Romans 10:21, Jesus is said to be like that father in the parable

- His arms are open wide
- *If only the son would come to Him*

Israel’s rejection is attributed directly to their own unbelief and disobedience¹¹

- Not a lack of knowledge
- Not a lack of opportunities
- Not a lack of God’s love

God’s arms are open and stretched out to you this morning, dear sinner friend

- “**WHOEVER WILL CALL UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED**” (Rom 10:13)

¹¹ Johnson, 187.