GOD’S MESSAGE TO A LOST WORLD

Romans 10:1-21
Key Verse: 10:9

“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

In today’s passage, Paul shares his heart’s concern for the people of Israel. Though they are the chosen people, they are not saved. Of course, Paul has a sentimental feeling for the people of his own race. More than that, however, Paul is expressing God’s heart to save all people of the world. No one should be lost in a world to which God has revealed his great love and mercy through sending his Son Jesus to be Lord and Christ. But in fact there are many who are lost, because of their self-righteousness. May God bless us to meditate on God’s message of faith by which all men can be made righteous and can be saved.

I. The message of faith (1-13)

In last week’s passage, we learned that there are two kinds of people in the world: those who are objects of God’s wrath, and those who are objects of God’s mercy. To our surprise, God shows mercy to them all, for in his great patience he has born with sinners until now, so that they might repent and be saved. Those who do not humble themselves and submit to God’s righteous will for their lives remain as objects of his wrath. As Paul lamented in chapter 9, the Israelites had received God’s overflowing blessings as his chosen people. They were objects of God’s mercy, whom God had built up into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. They were not ignorant of God’s blessing upon them, and they struggled time and time again to live up to God’s high calling. But, in the end, they stubbornly refused to submit to God’s world salvation hope for them. The law and the prophets, which were given to them by God’s grace for the sake of revealing God’s truth and life to the world, became for them a treasure which they buried in a field for the sake of their future security. Look at verses 1-4. “Brothers, my heart’s desire
and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” The Jews were God’s chosen people. As chosen people, they received all kinds of training and all kinds of privileges from God. But they fell short of the glory of God, when they depended on their training and status as chosen people instead of on God’s righteousness. They had lost their status as objects of God’s mercy, and had become objects of his wrath.

Look again at verse 4. “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” As we know well, Paul tried his best to meet the requirements of the law as a Pharisee and zealous defender of the Jewish nation. But the more he tried to satisfy the requirements of the law by his own labor, and the more he tried to please God according to his self-righteous standard, the more he became guilty before God. Paul was in a vicious cycle of self-righteousness and self-condemnation, until he met the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus. The Risen Jesus did not condemn St. Paul for his life as an enemy of God. Instead, the Risen Jesus embraced Paul as a coworker who was misled and had become confused. The Risen Jesus had come to him not to condemn him or destroy him as God’s enemy, but to set him straight, so that he might not kick against the goads any longer. The mission Christ gave to St. Paul was clear: “This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.” Acts 9:15,16. God chose Paul to serve his world salvation purpose, and make the righteousness available through faith in Christ Jesus known to all men of every nation. Paul had tried to make the law the end of his spiritual life. But he came to know that Christ was the end, not only for the Jews, but for everyone who believes.

In verses 5-8, Paul contrasts the righteousness that is by the law with the righteousness that is by faith. “Moses describes in this way the
righteousness that is by the law: ‘The man who does these things will live by them.’ But the righteousness that is by faith says, ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?” (that is, to bring Christ down) ‘or “Who will descend into the deep?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming.” We admire those who are heroic in their efforts to do what is right and good in this evil world. In many ways, the Jews epitomize this kind of spiritual heroism. They had so many heroes and heroines of faith. Among them are Moses, Gideon, Samson and David. But none of their heroes could do anything to change the sinfulness of man. Not one of their heroes could save their people from themselves. Moses went up to meet the Lord at Mt. Sinai and receive the law. For this, the Jews will never forget Moses as their shepherd and leader. But not even Moses could jump off the mountain to reach up to heaven and bring the word of life down to the people. Heroism is admirable in people. But heroism cannot save mankind.

The righteousness that is by faith is so different from legalistic righteousness. The righteousness that is by faith is believing that God will provide everything we need to serve his world salvation purpose. We don't have to go far to find the word of life. It is right here, in front of us, in his word. We don't have to go far to make a life-giving relationship with our Creator God. The Holy Spirit was sent down from heaven so that God the Father and Christ Jesus his Son might dwell in our hearts. All we have to do is believe in this grace, and make a confession of faith in Christ and in his resurrection, which made it all possible. Look at verse 9. “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” The righteousness that is by faith is not heroic at all. In fact, it is extremely suspicious sounding to self-righteous people. How can we be saved with words and just believing in the power of God? We must consider carefully what is this message of faith that has been proclaimed to us.

Look again at verse 9. “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” In this message of faith, Paul identifies two important
actions on the part of the believer. First, he must confess his faith in
Christ as Lord. Second, he must believe in the resurrection power of
God who raised Christ from the dead.

Jesus himself called Peter's confession of faith in him as Christ and
Lord the rock upon which the church of Jesus Christ would be built. At
first glance, Peter's confession didn't mean much. After all, as soon as
Peter made his confession, he was ready to rebuke Jesus for speaking
of his suffering, death and resurrection. And as the gospels record,
Jesus called Simon Peter Satan for having in mind not the things of
God, but the things of men. So, what good was there in such a
confession that was so obviously based on ignorance and unbelief?
But Jesus accepted Peter's confession as the foundation of his
church, and here, Paul honors the confession of Jesus as Lord as the
confession of faith that brings salvation to men. Unless we know more
than Jesus and St. Paul, we have to honor the confession of faith that
our sheep make in Jesus as Lord. We can also take comfort that Christ
honors our confession of faith in him, although we fall short in our lives
of service to him.

What is so important about the confession of faith? As we have been
studying, the difference between the objects of God’s wrath and the
objects of God’s mercy is very simple. Those who are not willing to
submit to God’s sovereign rule over their lives are objects of his wrath.
They stand in opposition to his sovereign will for world salvation.
Those who humble themselves and submit to God as Sovereign Lord
who created them for a good purpose, can be changed from objects of
wrath to objects of God’s mercy. The confession of Jesus as Lord is
our repentance for our self-righteousness and self-will. We
acknowledge that we are not the center of the universe, but that God
has made Jesus Christ who is God over all. By confessing Jesus as
Lord, we are stepping out of the darkness of rebellion and sin, and into
God’s tender mercy under his Lordship and care. Though we may not
understand fully what it means that Christ is our Lord, we cannot
make that confession except by the working of the Holy Spirit. In
short, even our confession of faith is not our own effort, but is the
result of God’s sovereign choosing and mercy in our lives. Ephesians
2:8 says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and
this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Once we have made that confession, we enter into a totally different relationship with God; one that is founded on God’s mercy and love, one that takes the assurance of God’s salvation as the starting point for everything that we do from now on. Just as Christ took the opportunity afforded him by the Samaritan woman’s confession, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t have to keep coming here to draw water,” and led her to know Jesus as her true husband and object of her worship, so Christ honors our confession and uses it as the foundation for our eternal life together with him in the kingdom of God.

After the confession of faith, we must believe in Christ’s resurrection from the dead. This is the foundation for our life of faith and service to Christ. That is, the characteristic of our life in God must be resurrection faith. This faith is two-fold in its nature. First of all, resurrection faith is faith in the power of God to renew all things. Our sins and mistakes make a terrible stain on our conscience, which nothing can clean away. Admiral Boorda was a simple man who had fought valiantly for our country and worked hard, starting from the enlisted ranks, until he became the Secretary of the Navy and admiral over the entire US fleet. In his desire to achieve recognition and honor from others, he had arranged it to receive several medals for his service in Vietnam which in fact he had not earned. Some reporters caught wind of the story, and threatened to make it public. At that time, Admiral Boorda could not remember all of the good things he had done in serving his country and fellow seamen. The stain on his conscience was too great, and he committed suicide rather than face up to his deception. So many good and well-intentioned people commit suicide rather than live any longer with the stain of sin and guilt. The reasons for their guilty feelings are many. But the solution to their problem is simple. They must believe in their hearts that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. It was the sin and mistake of all mankind to reject Jesus as the Christ and put him to death on the cross. But God's plan to save mankind was not thwarted by our sinful rebellion and rejection of his Son. God raised his Son Jesus from the dead. God defeated the power of sin and death, and made Jesus Lord and Christ. Therefore, our hope in Christ is not conditional or temporary. The power of God which raised Christ from the dead can give life to our
mortal bodies. We don't have to be trapped by the sins of our past any longer. When we live with resurrection faith, we can be renewed again and again as God's servants and instruments of his righteousness. When we live with resurrection faith, we are new creations, with an undying hope to be like Christ in his resurrection.

But resurrection faith is not just escaping from our past through plastic surgery. Resurrection faith is also the power source for our new life as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is resurrection faith that makes us heroes of faith in God's world salvation work. Resurrection faith is summarized in verse 11. “As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’” This is the amazing promise of God. For those who believe in this promise, it is the power source for a life of victory in Jesus Christ. Dr. Samuel Lee was mistreated as the step-son to a wicked stepmother. He was too short. He was sorrowful all the time because he never saw his own mother's face. He was fatalistic about himself and his country, so that he danced around in front of the North Korean soldiers trying to get shot rather than suffer any more in such a world. But God called this fatalistic young man to live for the glory of God. I don’t know the whole story of how God worked in him, but I know that he spent one evening walking all over Hong Kong, struggling whether to remain a country preacher as he was, or to live by faith for the sake of serving God's world salvation purpose in and through Korea. He decided to serve God. He was sure that he would die in the first five years of serving campus mission. Many times, he was ridiculed for his hope and faith. But in the end, it was not he who was put to shame. Rather, all those who doubted God’s promise and vision were put to shame, while Dr. Lee’s example of faith and obedience continue to shine and encourage college students in every continent of the world. He was a hero of faith. But his heroism came from believing God’s promise was true. May God bless us to believe in our hearts that God raised Christ from the dead, and live from now on as justified and glorified servants of our risen Savior.

II. The messengers of faith
Look at verses 14 through 15. “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach without being sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.’”

The message of faith has the power to change the world. The only limitation on its world changing power is the unbelief of the messengers. God had chosen his people Israel to proclaim the message of Christ. But they rejected Christ out of their disobedience and pride. Nevertheless, God made a way for the message to come to the Gentiles. God was not helpless, even when his chosen people failed to serve his world salvation purpose. They would be angry and envious to know that God could raise up stones to be the children of Abraham. But this was God’s sovereign plan and will. God is not frustrated by human unbelief. Nor is God’s hope and mercy extinguished by man’s rebellion. He continues to hold out hope that all of his people who have made the confession of faith may repent and submit to their true Lord and Husband, Jesus Christ.

In this passage, we have thought about objects of God’s wrath and objects of God’s mercy. We have also thought about righteousness by faith and self-righteousness. May God help us to make a confession of faith in Jesus as Lord. May God help us to live up to our commitment to serve him as Lord in this generation. May God help us to be the objects of God’s mercy by willingly participating in his world salvation purpose. May God help us to do so with resurrection faith.