

Romans 10:1-15

1 Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved.

2 For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

3 Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

4 Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

5 Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them."

6 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)

7 "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

8 But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim:

9 If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

11 As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame."

12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him,

13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

14 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?

15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Matthew 14:22-33

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd.

23 After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone,

24 and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.

26 When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear.

27 But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'

28 'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.'

29 'Come,' he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus.

30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'

31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?'

32 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.

33 Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

Righteousness and faith

Romans 10:1-15; Matthew 14:22-33

The passage from Romans comes out of Paul's passion for people, and particularly for the Israelites, to know the truth about Jesus.

My heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. And that's an issue which goes to the heart of what every one of us believes about God.

For Israelites read British, French, Palestinians, whoever. The Jews of Paul's time were obviously focused on the Old Testament law, the Torah, and the one thing that comes clearly out of the Torah is that keeping the Law and the Commandments are the only way to attain righteousness, to be in a good relationship with God.

Paul knew the law inside out. He was a Pharisee.

The difference now was that he had met Jesus.

From the start here he states the uncomfortable truth, that *the [Israelites] did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.*

This is what we all do if we're honest.

We try and make our own righteousness.

What is righteousness? Is righteousness being good? That's our instinctive belief, but it's wrong. If you look at other translations, righteousness is setting things right with God. (Message, NLT) It's being made whole, restored to God's intended state.

Gen 1:31 says God saw all that he had made, and it was very good

That includes humans. So righteousness is achieved not, as Moses said, by observing the law, but by being made good, and made whole, by God. That's a completely different thing. We *can't* be good. Anyone who tells you we can is deceiving you. *All* have sinned and fallen short says Paul. So we create religious frameworks and structures and systems which we make us think we're good and godly. Because we place ourselves at the centre of our world. And in effect make ourselves gods. If you read the books of the law, the first part of the Old testament, they're full of laws and rules and procedures which if followed closely would, at least according to the priests and religious hierarchy, guarantee you God's favour.

Two things were clear to Paul. Or should I say were made clear to Paul by the teaching of Jesus.

1. It didn't work. The Israelites continued to mess up, and continue to mess up, this day. As do we all.

2. God didn't want this anyway. We still regard the Old Testament as the word of God. So here is the word of God from the Old Testament: Isaiah 1:13 *Stop bringing meaningless offerings... I cannot bear your worthless assemblies.*

Amos 5:21 *I hate, I despise your religious festivals.*

Jesus has opened a completely different Way, which dispenses with the need for the Laws we find in Exodus and Leviticus and achieves the same end, of making us right with God.

v4 Christ is the culmination of the Law

We cannot make ourselves right with God. The law proves we never will because it's impossible to keep the Law.

God makes us right with Him instead.

Through the life, death and resurrection of Christ we're made right with God. The biggest lie is that we can achieve our own salvation by keeping the law. To quote Bob Dylan's *Precious Angel*, an ode to the woman at the well in John 4:

Sister, let me tell you

About a vision that I saw

You were drawing water for your husband

You were suffering under the law

If we submit to Christ, we are no longer suffering under the Law.

Hallelujah! This is why the essence of our worship is praise.

I think part of faith among other things is the knowledge of the burden being lifted, that the burden was placed upon Jesus.

So to look at the subject of faith I want to look at the gospel reading, the story of Jesus walking on the water.

I'm grateful to Tom Kennar, rector of Havant for some new ideas on this which I hadn't come across before.

My and possibly your standard take on this was Jesus walks on the water and Peter fails to do it due to lack of faith. It doesn't look good on Peter really. Tom Kennar takes issue with this interpretation. Is it really about a failure of faith? He says this:

Can it really be that God wants us to feel guilty when we're sick, or when accidents happen, or when people persecute us...

guilty that these things are happening because we don't have enough faith? I'm not sure I can believe that. Faith is not about being able to walk on the water. Only God can do that... In spite of all the evidence, faith is the act of believing that God is in the boat with us, sharing our pain, sharing in our weakness. God is made real in the community of faith as it makes its way through the storm, battered... by the waves.

And if you look again at this, it's not Jesus' idea that Peter gets out of the boat! Jesus does say *You of little faith, why did you doubt?* But what He's saying is did I ask you to get out of the boat? you don't need to come to me, why do you doubt I was coming to you? Is his faith in Jesus or in himself? This is the whole point. Our loss of faith is because we tend to fall back on our own strength. **But we are no longer suffering under the law!**

Of course this doesn't mean we can do what we want. We act as we are led, by the Spirit, in *response* to what God has done. Acts of faith and love are or should be in response to God, not to gain his approval. Going back to Paul in Romans, we're saved by faith, and the main ingredient of faith is not how hard we try or how long we spend in prayer or how much we give to charity, but whether or not we believe in our hearts. Do we even want to believe? That question alone is enough to start with.

It's not something that can be measured by anyone other than God himself, so it's the relationship between you and Him that matters.

Do we believe in God, and do we believe in the one he sent? Are we able to get on our knees, and, paraphrasing Paul ...*declare with our mouths, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead. Then we will be saved. Because it's with our **hearts** that we believe and are justified, and it is with our **mouths** that we profess our faith and are saved.*

It's when we get to that point that we begin to see and to really understand the good news of the gospel. I'll finish with another quote from Tom Kennar's sermon:

If I am poor, Jesus can show me how rich I truly am.

If I am sick, Jesus can show me how well I really am.

On the other hand, if I am rich, Jesus can show me my poverty. If I am healthy, Jesus can point me to where my sickness lays.

In EVERY circumstance of life, there is something to learn, some new growth for our souls to embrace. Life...is the proving ground for our souls. It's here that Jesus prepares us for life which goes on for ever. It's here that he sits beside us in the boat.

Amen