The Big Ask

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Preacher: Rev. George Sinclair

[0:00] Father, we've had lots of difficulties this morning with our sound system and other things. And Father, we are really very, very glad that we don't have to lean upon and depend upon things like sound systems, but that we are to lean upon you.

So Father, at this time we ask that you would help us to lean upon you and lean into you. We ask, Father, that your Holy Spirit would move deeply in our lives as we hear your word.
Lord, bring your word home to us, to the very center of our heart, so we might confess that Jesus is Lord and that we might, Father, be gripped by the gospel, learning to live for your glory.
And all this we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen. Please be seated. I'd like to, just sort of as a way of beginning, if you're a guest here, you don't know this, or maybe if you've been away for a few Sundays.
But this past, last two Sundays, I asked people in the congregation to pray for me. I like to pray for me all the time, actually. But on Wednesday, I was the guest speaker at church on Wednesday.
[1:14] So we're at the University of Ottawa, right in the University Center in a public open spot. And I ask that you would pray for me because I had to be in the University of Ottawa and pray on the text, wives, submit to your husbands and slaves, obey your masters, which, as we all know, is not even remotely controversial in the church or in the University of Ottawa campus.

And I mean, you know, in heaven, we'll find out what the true fruit of such times are. But I really want to thank you for your prayers. God was very kind. And he was very kind.
There were somewhere between 90 to 100 people who were there throughout all of it, plus different people wandering by. And one of the things is, and this comes from your prayers, I was not only, I think, able to try to bring open the text to people, but to also share the gospel through it, which sounds counterintuitive to a lot of people that you could take a text like that and use it to talk about the wonder of Jesus and who he is and what he did for us on the cross.
But I made an attempt to do that, at least, and people were quiet and attentive. One of the things that they do at church on Wednesday is after the talk is over, the sermon is over, they, I think they sing a song, they announce that people can ask questions of the speaker.
And they sing a song, and then we get to, they ask questions. And I have to answer the questions. And I think the very, very first question was, why should we trust the authority, why should we trust or believe the authority of the Bible?
[2:46] Why should we trust or believe the authority of the Bible? And I responded, oh, that's easy. And then I proceeded to give a very brief response. How I answered that question, that it's easy, and how it is that we would trust the authority of the Bible and why we should believe it.

Actually, it's not fully explained here, but in the text that we're about to look at, it will come out as to why it is that Christians should, why not only Christians, but others can trust the Bible and should believe that it's an authority.
So it'd be a great help to me as we look at this text. And it's funny, this text is actually talking about something else, but it also helps us to understand why it is that we can trust the Bible and it as an authority.
So the text is Romans chapter 9, verse 30. Romans 9, 30. And if you're one of the people here who's taken one of our free Bibles, it's page 653.
Romans 9, 30. And this is how it begins. Romans 9, 30. And those of you who are listening to Nora speak, if you're not sort of a real keen student of the Bible, some of it sounds a little bit confusing.
[3:58] And I'm just going to sort of read a bit. I'll make a couple of comments as we go, and it starts to get into sort of the big question or issue today. And you'll notice, by the way, that one of the things that the Bible is about to do is to disagree with 95% of Canadians.

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In fact, it's going to very specifically reject what 95% of Canadians believe, and which we Christians, because we breathe Canadian air, are always tempted to want to believe as well.
Here's how it goes. Romans 9, 30. What shall we say then? The Gentiles, here I'm going to use the word pagans, and it's a good word, and it refers to basically everybody who's not Jewish at the time that this was written, that pagans who did not pursue righteousness have attained it.
That is, a righteousness that is by faith. Now, I'm going to pause here, because those of you who are following along, I'm going to start doing something a little... I'm not cheating, and I'm not trying to get away from the Bible, but I'm trying to bring out something that's been established, if you've been here for previous weeks, about the meaning of these words.
It's not saying that pagans don't try to be good people, and then all of a sudden something's happened, and now they're good.
[5:22] It's not trying to say that at all. And it's also very interesting, if you look at your Bibles, it doesn't say that the Gentiles are the pagans, because it's not going to say that everybody who's pagan, this has happened.

It's just going to say that for some people, this has happened, who are pagans. And for the word righteousness here, I'm going to replace it by what it actually means more literally, which is become or made right with God.
And I haven't talked about being made right with God for a while, but if all of a sudden you just get this idea of making something right, every time I've talked about it, it's shocked me how often in movies and in books this concept of making something right is there.
You know, it could be something if you work at a Starbucks or something or a restaurant, and you can hear that there's a kerfuffle going on outside, and there's somebody who's unhappy or a couple of customers who are unhappy.
What you're hoping for if you're the poor person at the cash is that the manager will come and make it right. Okay, they'll make it right. And maybe they'll make it right by firing the customer, getting the customer out of there, calling the police.
[6:38] Maybe they'll make it right by giving them a free drink and just, you know, talking and listening to people. But you want somebody to make it right. You know, maybe you've been in a workplace, and there's lots of unhappiness going on.

There's lots of slander and backbiting and discontent. And people are hoping maybe that at some point in time, the management or higher up in the organization will come and make it right.
Okay, they'll come and make it right. And you know, whether that making right is maybe firing somebody or, you know, a lateral transfer or listening or whatever, it can involve a whole pile of things. But we have this sort of basic understanding still in our culture of having something made right.
Okay, and that's what's trying to get communicated here with this word righteousness in this particular context as a range of meaning. But that's what it means. So now I'm going to keep reading.
And I'm going to say that rather than righteousness. So we're not confused. Okay, so we'll start again. What shall we say then? Verse 30 of chapter 9, that pagans who did not pursue being made right with God have attained it.
[7:44] That is, being made right with God that is by faith. But that Israel, who pursued a law that would lead to being made right with God, did not succeed in reaching that law.

In other words, they followed a principle and they didn't actually do what they wanted to accomplish. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith. I'm going to explain this all in a moment. But as it were, as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.
And whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. Now just sort of pause here for a second. I don't know how many of you watch The Amazing Race. It's one of my guilty pleasures.
It's, I think, about the only thing I watch on sort of normal network TV. And it's, I think it's always 11 teams and they go around the world and they have to complete a series of tasks in foreign cities and follow, you know, they get a direction.
They have to go somewhere and complete a task. And one of the things which every year, it always happens several times, that the people are trying to figure out what something means.
[8:55] And they have it very, very firmly stuck in their mind that they know exactly what they're being told to do and exactly what it is that they have to see.

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And you as a viewer delight in the fact that the camera person will show them constantly walking by the actual thing they're supposed to find. And it's very interesting.
Sometimes, I remember this one time, there were these two young men and their self-talk was about how spectacular they were and how good they were at, they won everything they always did. And that was their sort of their self-talk as they were building each other up. But like complete doofuses, they spent a long time walking right by the thing that they were supposed to do and the sign that they were supposed to see.
And they were so, in a sense, caught up with how excellent they were and how successful they were that they couldn't find it. And it was one of those things of the viewer, in a sense, laughing at them.
[10:00] Now, Paul, we're going to see here in a moment, says that this just breaks his heart. But he's talking about that for the Jewish people, that God has provided with them laws.

And that the law, that not only refers to just the books of the first five books of the Old Testament, but in a sense, the whole Old Testament. But what's happened, he said, to his brothers and sisters who are Jewish, is they've gotten in their own head and in their own mind how it is that they're going to sort everything out by their standards and their criteria.
And the irony is that while they're trying to do that, they literally keep tripping over Jesus, so to speak. That they don't recognize that the entire, what we call the Old Testament, that the entire Old Testament was doing several types of things.
One of them is that it was trying to get people to understand that they couldn't keep it. That at some point in time, they had to just lay down, in a sense, their Bibles, lay down their sword and seal, lay down their prayer mats, lay down everything, and just say, only God.
Only God. Unless God does something, I'm in big trouble. And at the same time, what we call the Old Testament was to try to bring people to this recognition and this realization that unless God does it, we're really in trouble.
[11:29] At the same time, the entire Old Testament is setting all these clues and hints and riddles to point to how God is, in fact, going to do this. That God didn't write the Old Testament as some type of, like, it's not like Kafka's book, the trial, and some type of evil genius back behind the veil, creating all of these rules, just trying to see people trying to keep them, and all of them always just fail, and he's just up there laughing at us and scorn.

No, no, no, no, no, no, no. That, in fact, in the entire Old Testament, it's constantly giving us hints and riddles, and that when Jesus comes, that if people had actually come to the point of looking at the Old Testament and looking at the fact that why is it that I keep having to kill all these animals, and I just keep messing up, and only God, unless God deals with it, unless God, in a sense, provides that sacrifice, unless God is the one who sorts these things out, I'm in big trouble, and then God actually does send the answer to all of these pointers.
But they're so intent on actually trying to accomplish their understanding because they're so superior and they're so excellent, and they keep, in a sense, tripping over Jesus.
That's what Paul is trying to communicate. And then he continues in chapter 10, verse 1. Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.
Now, this is really, really, really important. You know, one of the views that non-Christians have of Christians is that we don't really care about people. We think we're better than them.
[13:11] And a lot of times, non-Christians, they're not being mean and prejudiced when they think that. Because, in fact, this text is going to continually try to humble us because the fact of the matter is that a lot of us view, those of us who are Christians, a lot of us view a lot of the city as a threat.

That a lot of us view people who are same-sex attracted or trans and living, from our point of view, a life that's not of God. And rather than our heart being broken for them and loving them, we find them as a threat.
Or we think of them as our enemies. And we do that with politics as well. And we as Christians, and I don't know, you know, I'm not going to pick, you know, but those of us who, you know, really love Trudeau.
And we view those who like, who supported Harper as a threat. Those who wanted to vote conservative. And they view people who vote for Trudeau as a threat, as bad people, as evil people.
And it goes on and on and on. Our hearts can actually be very, very, very hard to people. And we like those people who are sort of like us and sort of think our way, but we're hard-hearted towards

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other people.
[14:24] And non-Christians, if they have that perception of Christians, it's not prejudice. I mean, sometimes maybe it is, and sometimes maybe it's not really fair. But the fact of the matter is that our hearts are not often broken for our neighbors.

And that we have a real love for them. And that we want to view that there's nobody in our neighborhood who's our enemy. And nobody in this city who is our enemy.
There might be people who don't like us, but we don't want, I don't want to view them as my enemy. My heart wants to be like Paul's here in verse 1. We'll read it again in 10.1. Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.
I mean, for many of us, that's the point right now that we have to pause and do some work with God. To recognize how many people, we don't think that at all.
We'd like to see that person crushed. Those people who voted for Harper, I'd like to see them crushed. Those people who voted for Trudeau, I'm just waiting for everything to fall apart.
[15:30] So that I can just say, look, that's what's going on in our hearts. Not that our hearts burn with love for them. Then Paul continues.

And here's now where he's going to be actually quite un-Canadian. We'll read verse 2, 3, and 4. But for I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.
For being ignorant of the righteousness of God, in other words, the way that God has provided to make us right with himself, and seeking to establish their own way of making themselves right with God, they did not submit to God's way of making people right with himself.
In other words, the way that God was actually going to accomplish it. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. And I'm not going to talk much about this, but that's something, a constant part of the teaching.
It's what Jesus says himself in Luke 24 after his resurrection, that every single thing in the Old, what we call the Old Testament, every single thing in the Bible points to him. Everything points to him and who he is and what he's accomplished on the cross.
[16:39] Everything. Everything. Everything in there is moving to its goal, and in a sense, after Jesus, we just keep funneling us back to him.

We're going to talk more about that in a moment. But here, I just want to pause. Do you notice that un-Canadian thing in verse 2? Where he says, I have to turn the page, for being ignorant of the, no, for I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.
In other words, they have, they are deeply committed, authentically committed, and sincere. But they're all wrong.
Now, if you could put the first point up, Andrew, what is it that most Canadians say? It does not matter what you believe as long as you're sincere. And I've added something else.
It only applies to things that are not real and do not matter. Now, I don't want to offend you if you're here.
[17:42] I don't mean to offend you. I just want to consider this is, you know, is the Bible being judgmental and mean? Or is it just trying to point out something, which in fact, we realize, but we don't want to express it this way.

That it does not matter what you believe as long as you're sincere. Sincere only applies to things that are real and do not matter. So, for instance, just to give a very, very, you know, absurd example, you're flying in a jet, an Air Canada jet.
You're flying somewhere, it doesn't matter. I don't know, it has 150 people on it. And it's at 33,000 feet. And all of a sudden, over the intercom, it's announced that the pilot says that that Joe has a deep and sincere commitment that he believes he can fly a plane and land it.
And he's never had any lessons, never flown a plane before, but he's talked to his inner self. And both his inner self and him have really firmly convinced him that he knows how to fly jets and land them.
And so because the Air Canada pilot is a Canadian, he wants to respect sincerely held beliefs. And he's going to come and sit in the plane while Joe flies the plane without instruments and lands it.
[19:00] Now, of course, we would all laugh and we would all think it was hilarious, but if we actually came to think that that was happening, we would all be storming the cockpit. Because planes are real, and when they're at 33,000 feet, landing them matters.

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Okay? So it is, you see, so for many people when they say it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere, well, you know what they mean is, you know, I keep picking on, I keep saying, I'll just use it.
You know, it doesn't really matter that much. You know, if somebody just wants to go off and dance in a little circle at night out in the bush and call down the goddesses and call down the moon and get in touch with animal spirits, if they want to do that, that's completely fine.
Okay? And if somebody believes, it really gives them good meaning to think that, I don't know, you know, that the entire earth rests on a turtle's back and everything was created by, you know, when ravens talked and then some seeds fell out of their mouth and it fell out, and that's, you know, that's fine.
But if all of a sudden they actually wanted to change how biology and chemistry and physics is taught and you actually realize that they actually think that this is true, then you'd start to really think that they were actually psychotic.
[20:22] But even then, you'd still maybe just want to lock them up because it doesn't matter as much as landing a plane. And here's the part which is hard for Canadians to understand. It's why Christians keep getting in trouble in public.

That for Christians, we believe it's real. At least I do. If you're here as a guest, earlier on when I began my sermon, when I closed my eyes and prayed, I quite literally believe there is a God that does exist that I am speaking to.
It doesn't matter if nobody here believes it, that's actually what I believe. And when I ask the Father to pour out His Holy Spirit, I literally, I mean, I don't know what images I have, I don't really have any images, but I literally believe that I'm asking God who really does exist to really do something.
And when I say that Jesus rose from the dead, I believe there was a real historical person that He really did rise from the dead. When I, earlier on in the service, when I said, God, you created all things, sustain all things, there's not a square inch that you don't sustain yourself, I actually literally believe that.
And if it brings me into conflict with the biology faculty, then that on one hand is a bit of a daunting type of thing to take on, you know, 40 PhDs, but at the end of the day, I would say, I believe that this is true and real and it matters that when in John chapter 1, it says, in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God, He was with God in the beginning.
[21:52] All things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made. I believe that's literally true. I believe it's just as true as being on an airplane at 33,000 feet that has to land.

That's the Christian claim. And so you see, at first, when this looks like it's being very un-Canadian by saying that it doesn't, you know, that being sincere in fact isn't enough and it sounds very un-Canadian as if we're being rude.
Now, on one hand, for many Canadians that we go, good grief, you don't accept naturalistic evolution? Like, like, good grief, you actually believe that, like, there's demons and angels?
Like, you, okay, but it changes the conversation, right? And that's what the real, robust, historic, biblical Christianity is claiming.
We're saying that we're not like people who just go and call down the dark moon and have beliefs about, you know, chanting to the great, that we're, we're more, in a sense, like the chemistry faculty and the biology faculty.
[23:16] We're making those type of claims. believers. And now, what Paul is going to do, now that we sort of grasp the problem, I'm going to have, I might have trouble, anyway, now that we've sort of grasped the problem, the Bible is going to tell us now three surprising, counterintuitive truths.

In fact, if you could put it up, the point, three counterintuitive truths are taught by the Bible in very, very quick, summary fashion in the next three verses.
The first counterintuitive, counterintuitive truth, that's a bit of a tongue twister for me, counterintuitive truth is that all attempts to be right with God by rule keeping fail.
This is a great shock to non-Christians. It's actually a great shock to people who have gone to church for many, many years. Because, in fact, many Christians believe that rule keeping is what Christianity is all about.
But the Bible is going to, in fact, completely reject this. And the Bible is going to say that all attempts to ascend to God ascend to God to know him fail. I'm going to explain what that means in a moment.

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[24:27] And the Bible is going to say that all attempts to descend to God to know him fail. And it does it very, very briefly. And it's in verses 5 to 7. In a sense here, there's a basic rejection rejection of all of the philosophies, spiritualities, and religions of the world.

A basic rejection. Not because we think we're smarter. In fact, as I'm going to try to show, the heart of the Spurgeon got it completely right.
These rejections are going to humble us and bring us to our knees and make us realize that every Christian is merely one beggar telling another beggar where to get free bread.
It's going to be a complete and utter rejection of our deep-seated desire to be a superhero and tell us that we're beggars. That's the deepest, hardest part of Christianity that it constantly humbles us to bring us to our knees, to have us fall flat on our face, to acknowledge that we are beggars.
Here it is. I'll read them first and then we'll go back and look at each very briefly. Verse 5, For Moses writes about the righteousness or the way of being right with God that is based on the law that the person who does the commandment shall live by them.
[25:51] And some of you are saying, George, that contradicts what you just said, but we're going to go back and look at it and I'll show you why that's not the case. Verse 6, But the righteousness based on faith, the way of being right with God based on 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 abyss? That is to bring Christ up from the dead. So, the three things, the three counterintuitive truths taught by the Bible, first, all attempts to be right with God by rule keeping fail.
And verse 5, that's where it says it, and it looks at first as if it's saying the opposite. For Moses writes about the righteousness, the way of being right with God that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandment shall live by them.
What Paul is doing here, and it's a little bit hard if you haven't been to any of the services, you haven't heard any of the sermons, you haven't read any of Romans, but if you have a Bible like this, it's sort of very obvious that Romans starts over here, and Romans has done, he's talked about this, he's talked about this, he's talked about this, he's talked about this, he's talked about this, now he gets to this.
Sometimes I come home late at night, and my wife and kids are watching something on Netflix, and maybe they're two-thirds of the way through it, and I just come, I sit down or do whatever, and I come and watch the movie, and something said on the TV that to me sounds completely innocuous, and people, the others, chuckle or groan.
[27:21] You know, and I think, wow, they chuckle or groan, it just sounds innocuous to me. And that's because in the previous thing leading up to it, what they just say has a context that makes you chuckle or groan.

And so what Paul is doing here, this is now in chapter 10, and if you go through the book of Romans, one of the main things that Paul does in the book of Romans, he does it in the last half of chapter 1, all of chapter 2, and most of chapter 3, is he wants to try to bring you to the point of understanding that if your goal in life is to keep rules, and keeping rules is what's going to make you right with God, that you always fail.
You always fail, everybody fails, with no exception, if they're completely and utterly honest. And Paul tries to show that whether you follow the perfect, like God's rules, ones that he wrote that are in the Bible, or whether God will be completely and utterly just, and say, okay, George, you make your rules.
Okay, George, you write down the things that you have to accomplish, and you write them down, I'll let you choose. You write them all down, and then we'll just have a video cam that follows your life, and we'll just spend the next month and seeing how long it takes before you can't even keep the rules that you pick, that you make for yourself.
And that God is completely and utterly fair. And so Paul is just using here a very, very simple type of a catchphrase to remind us of the thing that he's been saying over and over and over again in many, many, many different forms throughout the entire book of Romans up to this point.
[28:56] And for many, many, many, many, many Christians, they believe that the Christian faith is all about keeping rules. Or, for you and I, we say, oh yeah, okay, no, no, no, no, no, I have to get down on my knees, I make the sinner's prayer, I give my life to God.

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But then, it's almost as soon as that's over, before we know it, how we evaluate how we are with God comes with how good we are at keeping our standards and our moral rules.
And how we end up coming to church feeling deeply depressed because, in fact, this past week we haven't been very good at keeping our rules, and we somehow or another believe that how we are with God depends upon our ability to keep rules.
But it never does. It never does. In fact, I'm going to share something. If you're a non-Christian and you are here today, one of the things, I'm going to tell you something about your Christian friends that maybe they don't even know about themselves or if they know it, they don't want to share with you, is that we Christians sometimes are deeply intimidated by people who are very successful at keeping rules.
That we look at, you know, maybe we look at some Jewish person, or we look at a Hindu, or we look at a Buddhist, or we just look at our neighbor who's really good at keeping financial rules, or another person who's really good at just keeping the rules about how you make promotions, or how you have the perfect house, or how you have the perfect wife, or how you have the perfect kid, the perfect dog, all together, none of the above, whatever it is.
[30:29] And we Christians can be deeply, deeply, deeply intimidated by perfect rule keeping and feel we have nothing to say. See, this text wants to humble us.

What should we say? I'm a beggar. I'm George. I'm completely helpless. I couldn't keep all those laws if my life depended upon it. In fact, the matter is, is if you saw how I ate, you'd know that I'm shortening my life by how bad I am at keeping rules.
We'd want to say, you know what, there's the good news that being right with God is never going to be based on keeping rules. Never. And then, we'll go and look, and in fact, here's another thing, is basically, all religion and spirituality is advice about the rules to keep.
All religion and all spirituality is advice about the rules to keep and follow. And the Bible here is saying, you follow them thinking you're going to live. Nobody will live because nobody keeps them.
Then verse 6, but the way of being right with God based on faith says, it's a rejection. Do not say in your heart who will ascend into heaven. Now this is a, that is, who will ascend into heaven, that is to bring Christ down.
[31:49] And here, what the Bible is telling us is that all ways of ascending to know God, they all fail. Don't try to follow them.

And there's, there's historically, there's been all sorts of different ways to ascend to God. The most common one is to have a mystical experience. And by having a mystical experience, we ascend to God.
And people who have mystical experiences and ascend to God, they're superior to other people. Or intellectuals who are able to, to think through great things and make great distinctions. And their minds become a series of ever higher abstractions and ever higher distinctions.
And they're just unbelievably brilliant. And maybe it's a matter that there's going to be these profound ascetic disciplines that just, that their spirituality, their mantras, their chanting, their yoga, that that is going to be a type of a way of ascending and ascending and ascending until we can actually reach and grasp God.
And for others, it's going to be through aesthetic experiences. The ability to appreciate unbelievably great music and get all of the nuances out of that music. And as the aesthetic experience of the music or the art or the poetry or the sculpture, as it fills our minds and our minds move to higher things and to higher things and to higher things so that we can grasp God.
[33:09] And the Bible says none of it works. None of it works. If you're a non-Christian and you were here, I want to share with you another thing about your Christian friend that you don't realize, we Christians are profoundly, profoundly uncomfortable in the face of profound assent because part of us wants to be like that ourselves.

We don't want to acknowledge that we're beggars. We want to think we're superheroes too. And when we come to people who have finer distinctions in their minds and their aesthetic experiences and their spiritual experience and their mystical things, we feel deeply uncomfortable because part of us, like fallen human beings, wants to be a superhero like that as well.
But the Bible says none of it works. One of the things that constantly, the people I talk to in Starbucks, one of the, for many of them, they'll bring up things about Christopher Hitchens and the presumption of thinking that human beings can know and capture God.

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And they tell me that thinking that they've got me and I say, I'm a Christian, I completely believe, I accept, I, Christopher Hitchens and I like this, we're bosom buddies, we think alike on this one. You haven't shocked me. I agree with it. And they go, like they don't know what to do next. They thought they've got me. That is presumptuous to think that any human beings can attain and grasp by themselves, by their minds, through their aesthetic experiences, the infinite God.
[34:41] We accept that. The Bible rejects it. And then there's the way of descent. Verse 7, where, who will descend into the abyss?

That is to bring Christ up from the dead. Now, we're going to talk about the second part of it, but this way of descent, once again, that's a very, very common way. When I went to do my master's in counseling, the supposedly Christian place, one of the things that I had to do in a class is I had to go deep within myself to first of all find, not only go from myself, but to go to my higher self and my higher self and eventually touch the transcendent cosmic self.
And it was a journey deep within. And there's also people who go, in a sense, a way of descent as they go into the past. They'll come and they'll tell us, well, you can just follow your God, but the New Testament was just written 2,000 years ago.
I follow some scripture and some practice that goes back to 4,000 B.C. long before Jesus was even the gleam in anybody's eyes. This, which is old and far more ancient, that's the path that I follow. Your thing is just a Johnny come lately. Or there's a path of descent into that which is purely physical, often connected with sex because in sexual knowing there's often something which feels transcendent and ecstatic about it.
[36:05] And so as you enter into this, it feels as if you're somehow another connecting to God. That somehow, and you think of people who believe that by getting themselves into some unbelievable trance or some other unbelievable act of transgression, that they're somehow another connecting by going down and getting to that which is base, that they are somehow connecting with that which is real and that which is God.

And the Bible said none of them works. None of them works. And non-Christian friends, I will tell you, for many of us Christians, we are profoundly uncomfortable in the face of that.
When somebody tells us that their way is far more ancient, often for many of us we don't quite know what to say because we wish that we could say that ours was more ancient. And when people talk about the experiences they have through drugs or through meditation in their depths or through profound experiences of sexual knowing, and for many of us we don't know what it is because we wish that we could be doing those things and we can tell you of our experiences and how our experiences are just as good as yours and even better.
And once again, the Bible is completely and utterly humbling us and we have to just say, you know what, that doesn't work either, I'm a beggar. And Canadians, like most human beings, don't like to acknowledge that.
And you were intimidated by it. Before we go to the next verses, we might go a little bit over time today, folks. Hopefully it's all right. But could you put up Romans 1, 16 to 17 for me at this time?
[37:44] The way the book of Romans is written is that the first few verses as Paul describes, a little bit of just sort of welcome. Then he tells them a little bit about his plans. And then those of you who have heard it, I keep saying it over and over again.

It's almost like a modern academic paper where there's the abstract at the beginning where the abstract gives you the basic content of the paper. And Paul does that in verses 1, chapter 1, verses 16 and 17.
And then after that, he goes into the problem, he goes into how God solves the problem, he goes into different other things. But everything in the book of Romans sort of unpacks this or is revealed by this.
So could you help me and read this with me, please, out loud. for I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.
For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. So what Paul is saying here is the gospel is something completely and utterly different.
[38:51] that the gospel is something completely and utterly different. Does rule keeping matter? Rule keeping does matter.

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But the good news is that you and I can't keep the rules. But as Paul has described up until now, Jesus perfectly keeps every rule and has a life of unbroken union with God, perfect obedience. And that what happens on the cross is that Jesus takes upon himself my inability to keep the rules and the punishment I deserve and he offers me his perfect keeping of the rules.
That's what Jesus does for me on the cross. And what else is happening on the cross is that God knows that I, by my finite, fallen, rebellious human mind, cannot pierce the heights of God.
That God breaks into our created order in the person of his son that Jesus comes to us.
[40:14] and that's why all Christian claims of intellectual superiority have to die because we have to say that none of it came from our thinking.

That God comes down. Jesus descends. And at the same time, and so that what in a sense is happening when Jesus dies upon the cross is we are observing the coming of Jesus from the Father's side and he descends to come to our created order.
He descends to come and actually be within the womb of Mary and then he lives a normal human life and his descent continues to actually dine upon the cross and his death upon the cross is going to mean that he's going to continue to descend and that there is no depth so low that Jesus has not gone lower, that there is no type of evil that we have done or that we know about that has not fallen upon the shoulders of Jesus that on the cross all of the that God in his descent he comes to us he takes upon himself all that keeps us from God all of the evil is going to come upon him he continues to descend until he's descended and tasted everything there is to taste of death everything there is to taste of evil everything there is to taste of shame everything there is to taste about separation from God that he goes lower than anything can possibly be to the very very depths and then on the third day God raises him from the dead and he ascends back into heaven that Jesus is teaching is teaching that comes from God that his death upon the cross is a bearing of our evil and the consequences of our evil upon himself
Jesus comes from above descends to the depths comes back up and as I'm going to say in a moment if we just put our hands in his he is the one who takes us to God that's what the gospel is it's the power of God for salvation Andrew can you put up the next point the gospel is the good news that by the resurrection God has vindicated who Jesus is and what he has accomplished the gospel is the good news that by the resurrection God has vindicated who Jesus is and what he has accomplished why trust the Bible it's a coming together of several things the first thing it's coming together about is that the resurrection is real and it matters if you study history if you study the historical records, if you study what went on, I believe that if you study it with even a remotely open mind, you will come to the conclusion that Jesus really existed, that he really died, and that the only way to account for what happens on the third day is that God raised him from the dead.
And that this is not just some isolated type of thing. It wouldn't be as if all of a sudden Joey died, and then three days later he came back to life. That would just be weird. Nothing personal, Joey, but it would just be weird.
[43:32] Okay, it could be, ah, that would just be weird, okay? But that Jesus dies and rises, and he talked about the fact that he was going to do that. He talked about the meaning and the significance of his life.

He talked about who he was. So that the resurrection of Jesus is not just, that's weird, but it vindicates who he said he was and what he said he's going to accomplish on the cross, which is this taking away of our rebellion and the stowing upon us a righteousness of God.
And that all of this takes place within a rich system of thought found in the Bible, a rich system of thought, a meta-narrative, and wisdom within the Bible that makes sense of, well, of abstract philosophy and of spirituality.
And on Wednesday I tried to show it, it makes sense of the difference between human beings, of men and women. And it makes sense in terms of how bosses and workers make, and how it makes sense of social structures.
And it takes place within the context of arguments for the existence of God. And it takes place, this life of Jesus and his death and his resurrection and the vindication of him, it takes place within a rich thing.
[44:36] And it's because of that that you can trust the authority of the Bible. I urge you, if you're a non-Christian, pursue to understand the historical record for who Jesus is and what he accomplished from the cross. I am not worried about that.

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Search it. I urge you to look into it for yourself. I urge you to look into it for yourself. Just very briefly in closing, just before we go, the gospel is the good news, right?
It's not good advice. It's not good rules. It's not good yoga techniques. It's not good community rules. It's not good rituals. It's not good institutions.
It's good news that by the resurrection, God has vindicated who Jesus is and what he's accomplished. We're just going to read these last verses because the Bible is going to bring it all home now in a very powerful image.
Verse 8 to 13. But what does it say? What does the Bible say? It's rejected rule keeping. It's rejected ascending. It's rejected descending. But what does it say?
[45:41] The word is near you in your mouth and in your heart. That is the word of faith that we proclaim. Because 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.

This is not George saying this. This is God saying this. I have no authority. I'm a beggar. You will be saved. Verse 10.
For with the heart, and this doesn't mean emotions. This means the command center of who you are. It means the very, very underneath your mind, underneath your will, underneath your emotions, the very command center of who you are, the very center of who you are.
For with the heart one believes and is justified, that is made right with God. And with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the scripture says, everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.
For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek. For the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
[46:43] Andrew, could you put up the next point? Only God can cross the infinite gap of time and space and being to come to you where you are, as you are, knowing who you are.

Only God can cross the infinite gap of time, the infinite gap of space, the infinite gap of being, because God is so completely other and different than you and me.
To come to you where you are, as you are, knowing who you are. If you could put up the final point, Andrew, God says to us in verse 9 and 10, I'm just changing the word slightly to make it, this is God speaking to you directly and me directly.
If you confess with your mouth, this is not George speaking, it's as if God is saying to you and you and you and you. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, believe in your heart that I raised him from the dead, I will make you right with me now and forever.
God says to you and you and me, you're a beggar. Get over yourself.
[47:53] You're going to spend your entire Christian life getting over yourself. I'm going to keep having you read my word, and if you read my word correctly, it's going to help you get over yourself. Get over yourself.

You're a beggar. If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that I raised him from the dead, I will make you right with me now and forever. You know, if you watch Hollywood movies, this is the closing image I'm going to ask you to stand.
If you watch Hollywood movies, a very, very regular thing in Hollywood movies is there's a group of noble people, and they're fighting the evil overlord, and then very, very close to the end of the movie, one of the heroes or the hero's best friend.
Bang, they get shot. Bang, they get shot. Bang, they get shot. And down they go. And the other team members are all completely inhorrified. Not Sally. Not Fred. Whatever their name is.
And they rush over to the person who's lying there. And the very, very next thing you see is you can just tell that the person's dead. And two of the people, they're firing their guns at the bad guys, keeping them off.
[48:55] And there's a third person, and they're on the radio. They're calling in a helicopter support or spaceship support to come so there can be a medic to come and help their friend. But their friend is dead. They're not breathing. And there's another friend on top of them, and he's pushing on the chest, and he's doing like this, and he's doing like this, but the person's dead.

And there's another two people, and they're putting their hands right where all the bullet holes are because the blood's coming out because they want to stop it, but the person's dead. And then there's another person, and she or he is saying, don't go away from me.

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Come back to me. I love you. I'm your friend. Come back to me. But the person's dead. They are dead, dead, dead. And then the camera keeps going back and forth, and you get into the mind of the person who is dead.
And they're just lying there. Blood's coming out of their bullet holes or their ray gun holes.
Somebody else is firing to keep all the dead, all the bad guys.
Somebody else is calling for the medic. Somebody else is doing the CPR. Somebody else is putting their hands in the bullet hole. Somebody else is doing all of that. They're just lying there dead. And you see in their mind that they're starting to go away.
[50:02] And then the person who's calling them back, or maybe they have an image of their child at home, or their mom or something, their dog. I don't know. They have this image, and the image is right there.

They're not doing anything. They're just lying there dead. And they can see this image now in their mind. And they come back. And the next thing you know, as they come back, because the person, that has come to them where they are dead.
And the next thing Hollywood shows is the eyes open. Take a big breath. And the people with the guns are shooting even more now, and then the helicopter comes, and they take them away, and they're all alive. And then the next thing you know, they live happily ever after.
That is an image of what Paul is talking about here. That is an image of what Paul is talking about here. God crosses the infinite distance.
God is the one through his son who's fighting off the bad guys. God is the one doing the CPR. God is the one in the bullet holes. God is the one calling to you. He comes to you when you are dead and helpless.
[51:10] He provides the power to make you right with him. He provides the power for you to live.

He does it all through the cross in the person of Jesus. And this is what Paul proclaimed, and this is what I am telling you.
And it is for you today. If you have not done it, there is, don't wait, don't wait.
If you feel the pressure of the Holy Spirit, you feel Jesus, and you know he's been knocking on your door, there is no better time than now to with your lips say, Jesus is Lord.
You see, raised him from the dead, you know that Jesus is the one vindicated by God, that he is in fact the power of God for salvation. And Jesus is Lord.
[52:12] You're acknowledging not only what he's done, but who he is, and what he will be for you for all eternity. Please stand. Thank you. You don't have to scream it out or shout it out, but even if it's just very quietly under your breath, there's no better time than right now, maybe for the very first time in your life, and you know that Jesus has come to you to just say, Jesus, you are Lord.

You are my Lord. You are the one that God has provided to make me right with you. You are Lord. You are Lord. Father, we confess before you that we love this idea that we are redeemed by grace and by what you've done for us on the cross through Jesus, but Father, you know how quickly we think that it depends upon how good we are at keeping rules.
Father, you know how quickly it is that we desire that we'd be a superstar at rule keeping or a superstar at rule breaking or a superstar at being brilliant and thinking brilliant things and having mystical experiences or how soon we wish that we can go into the depths of everything.
Father, you know how deeply addicted and divided we are as human beings even after we've made Jesus as Lord to somehow think that it's all about us being superstars. Father, you know, Father, we thank you so much that you know every single thing there is to know about us when your son died upon the cross and still he died on the cross for us.
Still he loves us. Father, make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel. Gripped by the gospel that we, Father, can humbly say, I am a beggar when it comes to rule keeping.
[53:54] I am a beggar when it comes to being brilliant. I am a beggar when it comes to descending into the depths. Father, please pour out your Holy Spirit upon us. Make us disciples of Jesus gripped by the gospel.

So freed up that we can humbly with faltering steps live for your glory. And this we ask in Jesus' name. Your son and our savior and God's people said, Amen.

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