

God's Voice is Heard

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[0:00] Good morning, church family. My name's Bec, if I haven't met you yet. We're going to continue reading from Romans chapter 10, starting at verse 14.

The previous verse says, For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. So that's where we're picking up from in the very next verse, verse 14. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?

And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?

As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news. But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. But I ask, Have they not heard? Indeed they have.

[1:12] For their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world. But I ask, Did Israel not understand?

First Moses says, I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation. With a foolish nation, I will make you angry. Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, I have been found by those who did not seek me. I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me. But of Israel, he says, All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.

This is the word of the Lord. Good morning, everyone. If you're visiting today, My name is David. I'm one of the pastors here. A warm welcome to you. We're in Romans 10. If you want to get your Bibles open to there, and I'm just going to pray before we sit under God's word.

[2:17] Father, we ask for your spirit to illuminate our minds so that we understand your word.

And we pray for your mercy, that your word would penetrate each one of our hearts, that we might see the Lord Jesus as he is, that we might be rejoicing in the salvation we have in him.

A fresh, Lord, maybe for the first time, we pray that you'd be in this room now speaking by your word. In Jesus' name. Amen. There was a public atheist, Alex O'Connor.

I don't know if you've come across his material. He shares his personal experience to what he sees as one of the biggest problems of Christianity, the problem of divine hiddenness.

If there is an all-loving God who desires a relationship with us, then why is God so hidden? Alex says this, If there is a God, then simply why is he hidden from so many of us so much of the time?

[3:35] I've looked in poetry, I've looked in the Psalms, in Job, in Ecclesiastes, I've looked in Dostoevsky, I don't think I said that right, I read C.S. Lewis, I listened to worship music, I prayed, I studied the gospel, I even got an actual degree in theology at a university, and nothing, nothing.

Not once, not nearly, not ever, not even briefly have I experienced anything that it speaks to the existence of a God in the universe. I don't want to quickly minimise this problem.

You can almost hear his heart in this. I don't think apologetic arguments, like the fine-tuning of the physics in this universe that we're even here, like that is astonishing, but I don't think multiplying those kind of arguments solves this problem.

We should take this problem seriously, because we believe from Genesis and the whole Bible that we were created for face-to-face communion with God.

So where does the problem for Alex O'Connor and many others seeking God lie? What's going on? Where's the problem? Let's consider that question as we look at the problem for Israel in Paul's day, in our passage today.

[5:18] Where does the problem lie? Just to get our bearings again, chapters 9 to 11 is answering the problem that, in Paul's day, so many Israelites, despite all their privileges, having all the Old Testament knowledge, they're outside the kingdom.

They're not saved. Throughout these chapters, the contrast is always there. They're outside, but Gentiles are flocking in.

They're in. What? What's going on? Chapter 9 is focusing, saying God's word has not failed.

It's always been the case since Ishmael and Isaac that it's not the physical descendants of Abraham, it's those born of promise, God's sovereign mercy choosing.

Now, that's looking from heaven's angle, but he flips the coin and looks from human responsibility angle as well. It's always 100% God's sovereign mercy and 100% human responsibility.

[6:29] We saw last week, Israel are responsible because they're trying to be right with God by what they do. They're not listening to the whole Old Testament that pointed forward to Christ.

They've got so much passion, so much zeal, but they don't have knowledge because all the Old Testament was pointing to Jesus. It's always been by faith. It was always pointing to Jesus.

It was always pointing to the nations coming in. The law, prophets and writings clearly said this.

God has brought salvation right up to Israel's heart and mouth, but they have not submitted to God's righteousness, his way of being right with him, which is by faith in his son.

Now, in our passage this morning, Paul is, I think, zooming in on the problem a bit deeper. Is the problem in that they haven't heard the gospel? Have they not heard this wonderful message?

So we're going to see three things this morning. We're going to look at three things. The vital links chain, you need these links in order to be saved in verses 14 and 15.

[7:55] He then identifies where in those links is the problem and then we're going to see how do we get that missing ingredient. I'm changing language there.

How do we get that vital link that's missing? So that's where we're headed. So verses 14 and 15.

How then will they call on him, call on Jesus, in whom they have not believed?

And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? Nowhere else in all the scripture, I think, lays it out so clearly what someone needs from God to that person to be saved.

Here's what you need. It's a beautiful passage. Where does the fault lie with Israel not being saved?

Now he doesn't mention Israel until verse 19.

The immediate context is the gospel's going everywhere, everyone. So I think these links are for everyone. Young and old, whatever passed, anyone who calls on Jesus to be saved from sin and judgment.

[9:15] You can hear different words, that calling, but there is a calling because it expresses the belief in the heart. Save me. Forgive me. Rescue me. Take charge of my life.

There is a calling. You can't just be born into the kingdom. You've got to call. In fact, I think Christians never stop calling.

We're saved from that moment of calling, but we're constantly calling. Jesus, please help me today. Please rescue me from this. A Christian is just calling.

But you can't call if you don't believe in him. Believe is not less than theological understanding, but it is more.

It's committing yourself to the person of Jesus. But you can't give yourself to Jesus unless you've heard of him.

[10:21] The wording here of hearing, it could even mean when you hear about Jesus, you're hearing Jesus speak to you. When you hear the message, you're hearing Jesus.

I know my voice is ordinary today, but through God's word, you're hearing Jesus. But you can't hear Jesus without someone preaching, without someone telling over the back fence in Grace Kids right now.

Why Jesus tonight? But someone can't preach unless they're sent. So where's the problem?

There's the vital links. Where is the problem? Verse 15b picks up the first vital link. Has God sent preachers?

And he quotes Isaiah 52, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news. Now the context there is God is sending.

[11:29] This, what Isaiah talked about, the good news, this is it. He's sending. It's here. The context there is, it's God himself speaking.

The context there is, Jerusalem is singing for the salvation. But the context is also, all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. Now what's, what follows after Isaiah 52?

Isaiah 53, yes. And it's one of the most clearest, beautiful, prophetic pictures of what Jesus was going to do.

His suffering to deal with sin and his resurrection and triumph making many righteous and the victory. Has God sent people to declare this good news?

Absolutely, Paul said. He sent the apostles. The start of Romans, chapter 1, verse 5, Jesus Christ, our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among the nations.

[12:50] He's writing to a church in Rome about 20, 25 years after Jesus and there's an established church in the heart of the known world.

Has he sent? Yes, he's sent. The apostles, the church is living proof. We here today are living proof. He is sent. Now I'm guessing the focus on beautiful feet isn't that Paul got a pedicure.

The focus on, I think the focus on feet is they've travelled. God has sent. They've travelled. They've crossed borders. Any difference in the world, you have to go across differences to get the message across.

Whether geographic or social differences amongst us, they've travelled. God indeed has sent his word. Now I think something is implied here.

If God is sending anyone, if God's the one sending anyone who says salvation is in Jesus, he is Lord, just by faith, not by what you do, however you express that, whatever words you use, you have the authority of God.

[14:10] We're going to do it humbly, don't get me wrong, but I think we've also got to know the confidence we can have. God is sending. Some ask the question, what about the person in tribal Africa who has never heard?

Some want to say God is inclusive, that he's very inclusive, the gospel is to all people, but inclusive in the sense that, well, they may not have heard about Jesus, but as long as they're just depending on God's mercy, they will be saved by Jesus, even though they've never heard about him.

But I don't know how you square that with this, I just don't know how that fits with this passage.

Now, God doesn't condemn someone for not hearing about Jesus.

Romans 1 says, all creation, everyone knows there is a God and everyone suppresses that truth and everyone exchanges God for created things.

Or your conscience, we've all got a conscience, no one lives up to their conscience. So whatever we know about God, that's the reason we need to be saved.

[15:38] That's, we haven't responded to what we've heard. You think about Cornelius in Acts 10. If there is anyone who should be in, just, he's never heard about Jesus, he's fearing the Jewish God, he's so morally upright, he should be in.

But what does God do? He sends Peter. And in hearing the gospel, he believes and he's saved. There was a man named Joseph.

He shared his story as part of the Billy Graham Crusades. I don't know if you've heard this before.

Not that he was saved at the Crusades, but he shared how he was saved at the Crusades.

He's from the Maasai people in Kenya and northern Tanzania and just on an African road, someone shared the gospel with him and he believed right away.

It's kind of like the Ethiopian eunuch kind of story. And he was so delighted that he went to his own village and Joseph began going door to door telling people about the cross of Jesus and he expected their faces to just light up.

[16:56] But to his amazement, the men grabbed him, held him down while the women got some sort of barbed wire and just beat him. And they dragged him out of the village and somehow he survived that and he thought, I must have got something wrong.

I must have said it wrong. And so he rehearsed it again and must be by the spirit's power. He went back and he said it again.

He died for you so that you might find forgiveness and come to know the living God. And the men grabbed him and the women beat him again and they dragged him out again and somehow he survived again.

Now, I don't know why, I think I would have given up by then, he went back. And before he could even open his mouth, the men grabbed him again. And the women beat him again.

And this time he woke up in his bed and the women are trying to nurse him back to life and the whole village comes to Christ. God sends, he's still sending.

[18:10] Don't expect a positive response necessarily. Has he sent? Yes, and he's still sending. Well, have they heard?

Let's go to the next vital link. Have they heard? We're going to come back to verses 16 and 17 because I think that's the climax of the point. So we're going to come back. So verse 18.

But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for their voice has gone out to all the earth and their words to the ends of the world. Now this is quoting Psalm 19, which the verse is actually about the heavens declaring the glory of God, which theologically, that's God's general revelation to everyone.

You can know something about God just by looking at the stars, seeing the sun. Now you can't be saying that by nature, looking at nature, you can understand Christ because again, that doesn't square with this passage.

How does this quote then answer, has Israel heard? I don't think he's just grabbing hold of these words to exaggerate the point. I think some people see Paul as exaggerating a bit.

[19:37] The close context here, and I think throughout Romans 10, is that the Gentiles, the world is coming in. Israel can't say they haven't heard.

I think he's picking up the context of Psalm 19. The first bit of Psalm 19 is general revelation, but the next part, if you know it, is about the law. God has spoken to Israel, a very understandable word.

God is speaking again, his gospel.

I think he's using it as a picture. God is committed to his glory. You can see that in general revelation. He wants everyone to know his glory. His light from the sun reaches every nook and cranny on the earth.

Everyone can see it. In the same way, he is going to speak to the whole world about Jesus. The light of Jesus will reach every nook and cranny over the face of the world.

[20:52] going to I think this light dawned immediately at Pentecost. You've got the diaspora of the Jewish people coming from all over the known world and immediately they're hearing the word of God in their own language and many come to faith.

Immediately the light just spreads. spreads. That's the book of Acts, isn't it? The word of God will not stop.

Whatever tries to stop it, the light is spreading. You can't stop it. Has Israel not heard?

Just think of Paul's missionary experience, his first hand experience. He went to the synagogues first. They heard everywhere he went and they even accused Paul of having heard in Acts 24 verse 5.

They charge Paul before the Roman governor Felix. They say, we have found this man Paul a plague, one who stirs up riots among all the Jews throughout the world.

[22:11] They're testifying against themselves. This guy's a plague. All the Jews have heard about his message. Have they heard?

God's light has reached them. It's reached them. It's spreading as far as the sun spreads on the face of the earth.

Now verse 19 and 20, he seems to dig in. They've heard, but was that a superficial understanding? Do they really understand? Did they really understand the message they were hearing?

Is that the problem? It's like thinking you hear Abba's song Dancing Queen correctly as you sing along. See that girl, watch her scream, kicking the dancing queen.

Just if you don't know, that's not the lyrics. You're not hearing it right. There's no one kicking anyone. Was it a superficial hearing?

[23:21] Do they really understand? Well, if we quickly survey Acts, Stephen, the first martyr in chapter 7, he declares his vision after his speech.

He sees Jesus at the right hand of God in heaven. Now, that's pretty clear to Jewish ears. And they cried out and they rushed at him, they dragged him out and they stoned him.

They heard it all right. They understood. And there's rage. Paul is converted and he starts preaching in Damascus, the very town he went to put people in prison, and the Jews plot to kill him. He has to be lowered in a basket at night time out the wall. There's rage. We see this pattern again and again in Acts.

they hear Paul's preaching, they either exile him or they try and kill him. They are jealous for the law of Moses and the temple and they hear the message.

[24:37] Jesus is now the center of God's salvation plan, fulfilling the law and temple. They understand it all right.

They hear the lyrics, they just hate God's tune. They understand the lyrics. They see Gentiles automatically become sons and daughters of the living God simply by faith and there's a rage. Their jealous anger shows that they understand. They get it. They get it. God's love to God. He's quoting Moses and Isaiah.

Moses is the first in line saying the Old Testament was pointing forward to this time. The nations are going to flock in and Israel are going to be angry.

They've heard since Moses. they understand. Coming back to Alex O'Connor who I started with, has he truly understood the gospel?

[25:51] I don't know the man. God ultimately knows. My first encounter with Alex was in a podcast interview with Jordan Peterson.

He was pressing Jordan Peterson, do you believe in Christianity? Jordan Peterson talks about Christianity non-stop but he's reluctant to commit to say, yes, I'm a Christian.

Alex was pressing him and he came up with this test for Jordan going, do you believe this? Yes or no? He said, if I went back in time with a Panasonic video camera and put that camera in front of the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, would the little LCD screen show a man walk out of that tomb? I couldn't come up with a better question. That's a great question. Does Alex understand who Jesus is claiming to be and what he's done? God is a We as a church, as we've got opportunity to share who Jesus is, how he's impacted our lives, can I encourage us by all means, please, let's go the extra mile to make sure people actually understand what we're saying.

Let's use language people comprehend. Let's address any stumbling blocks, any questions, any doubts.

[27:28] Let's take them seriously. Let's be patient. Let's use rational arguments to go belief in Jesus is not only possible, it's wonderful. We need to distinguish between what people think we're saying, you've got to be good to go to heaven, from faith.

But in the end, the responsibility lies with each person to respond to what they've clearly heard and understood. That's not our burden to carry.

Let's go the extra mile to help people understand, but it's not our burden to carry how they respond. So where then is the fault in the vital links to be saved?

Verse 21, the Lord's assessment through Isaiah is all day long I've held out my hands. It's a gesture of welcome and embrace. All through Israel's history, I've held out my hands.

Constant offer of grace. grace, even to this day, to a disobedient and contrary defiant people.

[28:51] This is from Isaiah 53, again, at the heart of who Jesus is. Isaiah said, some people just will not want to come, will not hear it.

verse 16 is the missing link. They have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?

That root word for obey is the same for hear. I think he's playing off the hear here. hear here. It's like a parent talking to a child.

You didn't listen to me. True listening is obedience. So, too, with God.

The fault is not with ears. The fault is in the heart of not obeying what is clearly heard. the announcement from heaven in the gospel is such wonderful news.

[30:11] Like, through the crucified risen saviour, there's complete forgiveness. Complete forgiveness. There's assurance you are declared right.

That heavenly judgment, that courtroom, you are justified. You're right with God. There's assurance. There's a legal name change.

You have the right to be called children of God. You're adopted simply by faith in Jesus. There's divine connection and communion and power.

There's resurrection power in your life now by his spirit dwelling in us. We have a hope. We're born into a living hope. His resurrection is going to be ours.

We're looking forward to the resurrection of the universe and that's ours simply by faith. It's such a wonderful message. You've got to scratch your head and wonder why doesn't everyone just what's going on?

[31:13] What's the barrier here? You've got to confess at the heart of Christian faith is Jesus is Lord.

God is the Lord. requires handing over your allegiance to him. He's your Lord. He's the Lord. I think we should expect Satan to rage against this.

His lies will rage. If you hand yourself over completely to Jesus, you will be miserable. you should expect the world to rage because we want to keep control.

We want the kingdom or the blessings without the king to tell us how to live. You should expect your remaining sinfulness to rage. We want to sit on the throne of our lives.

Even as Christians it's hard, isn't it, to hand over control to Jesus. God has brought the gospel light right to Israel's heart and mouth.

[32 : 31] They understand the fault lies in their disobedience of unbelief. They don't want Jesus to be Lord.

So how do we get this vital link of faith? Verse 17, how do we get it? So faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ.

The kind of hearing that can lead to faith can only happen with the word about Christ, the word of Christ. St. Francis of Assisi, hopefully I said that right, preach the gospel at all times, use words if necessary.

He preached the gospel at all times, use words if necessary. Is that right? Here at Grace, we actually like the term witness a bit more than evangelism because we're witnessing all the time, our whole lives.

Just the other day I heard someone, an unbeliever, talk about their boss, just seeing in their boss their patience and peace. they could see a difference.

[33 : 52] There was a witness. But what creates faith and what nourishes faith is the word about Christ.

It's not some general notion of God. Words are necessary. That's why we get together each week, isn't it? we got to keep the word of God central in this church.

Like preaching, it can be doctrinally true, but sometimes it can miss Christ. Christ is missing from the sermon. If you hear that from us, pull us up.

Our songs, I got a musical friend, he was saying that his faith was just becoming malnourished because he realised all the songs are about my praise of God.

There was a wrong emphasis. The songs weren't about what God has done, what Jesus has done. That's what nourishes faith. By all means, some songs that go, I worship you, Jesus, they're appropriate, don't get me wrong.

[34 : 59] But we need to keep it's the word of Christ that creates faith and nourishes faith. So St. Francis is wrong.

Be a witness all the time, but you need words. Can I ask at this point, what are people hearing from you? Please may not be a hobby horse, some secondary hobby horse of Christianity.

They don't need to hear that. They need to hear Christ first and foremost. fortunately, it doesn't even need to be a well crafted word to create faith and I take great comfort from this in my job.

God's sovereign mercy can use the dullest tool in the shed. Charles Spurgeon, how he was converted I think illustrates this.

The prince of preachers, how he was converted, it was on a wintry Sunday, January 6, 1850. He was in a Methodist church and because of the snow, the preacher couldn't turn up so someone had to get up and say something.

[36 : 25] There was about 15 people present and this shoemaker or tailor, he got up and read Isaiah 45, 22, look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, there is no other.

And then he said something along the lines, now looking don't take a deal of pain, it ain't lifting your foot or your finger, it is just look. A man needn't go to college to learn how to look.

A child can look, however weak or however poor a man may be, he can look, and if he looks, he shall live. And he focuses on Spurgeon, a young man, because he's 15 at the time, look to Jesus Christ, look, look, look.

You have nothing to do but look. look. And Spurgeon says, I did look. And that was the moment. Such a simple word.

Spurgeon says, I thought I could dance all the way home. I could understand what John Bunyan meant when he declared he wanted to tell the crows on the ploughed land all about his conversion.

[37 : 47] He was too full to hold. He felt he must tell somebody. God can use a very simple word. We've got baptisms coming up here.

It's such a reminder. God's voice is still being heard. He's still bestowing all his spiritual riches on all who call on him.

He's still sending his voice to the ends of the earth. Chapter 10, you can't miss the emphasis. Everyone. There's no distinction between Jew and Greek.

He's the Lord of all. He's bestowing his riches on all who call on him. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. That light of the gospel, he's still spreading it.

It's like the sun in the heavens, the light of the gospel, is reaching people sitting in darkness. He's going to reach every nook and cranny of the globe. That's the heart of God.

[38 : 57] He's merciful, he's outreaching, he's generous. I don't care enough about how lost people are. I don't.

But God does. When you see the heart of God, that's what fills our heart. Let the heart of God fill your heart afresh.

That we might keep weeping to those who don't know, and keep praying for opportunities. Like, do you pray before you go in for your haircut?

you go in for your haircut? keep inviting. Keep reading the newsletters of gospel workers.

Invest time. Let's keep praying, holding the ropes of prayer while they're going down into a place that hasn't heard.

[40 : 05] I hope we sense the privilege of being God's mission partners. It's his mission. He uses ordinary us to be part of that.

God's voice is still being heard. And praise God for that. Will you pray with me? God's Father, may none of us pat ourselves on the back for having responded to your word.

We praise your mercy alone to give us eyes to see the Lord Jesus. Just as you said to Peter when he confessed to you, that flesh and blood did not reveal this, but my Father in heaven revealed this to you.

So we praise you for your mercy in sending people into our lives to share your word. We just praise the God you are. You're not hidden. Your voice is heard in all the earth.

Father, help us to sense that privilege of being used by you. Give us confidence and humility.

[41 : 28] Help us not get distracted. Father, please be using us to save more and more people, both locally and globally. In Jesus' name, amen.