

People's Real Choice

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[0 : 00] When one of my daughters was younger, she came home from kinder and told us about an argument she had with another girl at kinder about who the boss of the playground was.

They both claimed to be the boss of the playground. And then my daughter, in an effort to win the argument, said, well, actually, Jesus is the boss of the playground.

Now, I like that she knew that, but I'm not sure I like that she used it to win an argument. But as parents, it's interesting watching your kids grow up.

But it's also sometimes heartbreaking, like on another occasion when she was little, she asked why one of her good friends didn't go to church, why she wasn't a Christian.

How do you answer that? Because it's not just her friend, but it's some of our friends and our family. And for Paul, the apostle, it was many of his fellow Israelites.

[1 : 02] This is the issue that has sparked these chapters 9 to 11 in Romans. Because if anyone in the world was supposed to be a Christian, supposed to be saved, it was Israel, do you remember?

They were the very people of God, or supposed to be anyway. And so why aren't they? Well, we saw last week that the first half of Paul's answer is because God did not choose all Israel to receive mercy.

Now, that raised some understandable questions for us, didn't it? And we looked at that last week. If you missed last week, then you can listen to it online. But it was only half the answer.

The other half of the answer is this week. And that is, Israel themselves chose not to believe.

Instead, most chose to try and make themselves right with God.

Or as Paul puts it, they pursued righteousness by works, not by faith. So point 1, chapter 9, verse 30. What then shall we say?

[2 : 11] Now, to pursue righteousness means to pursue being right with God.

Our sin has made us enemies with God, whether we realize it or not. And so we'll face judgment for that. But we can all be made right with God, which means being saved from judgment for life eternal.

But the problem with Israel was they tried to make themselves right with God by keeping the law.

Do you see verse 31 again on your screens?

The people of Israel pursued keeping the law as a way of righteousness. But they did not attain it.

Why not? Verse 32. Because they pursued it, not by faith in Jesus, but by their own work or effort at keeping the law.

Even people today think that's how it works. You know, if they keep the laws, or at least the important ones, like, you know, do not murder, or at least the law as a way of righteousness, or at least the law.

[4 : 04] Which is really good, because that actually got you straight to God, to square 100. But if you landed on square 98, avarice, which is the old way of saying greed, then you went down the snake.

A snake, which is very Genesis 3, isn't it? And here's one for you blokes in the bottom right corner. Frivolity. If you play jokes on people, well, then that took you down the snake as well.

You see, because we usually have to earn things in this world, then people thought that applied to God too, that that's how God works as well.

But it's not. In fact, this way of making yourself right with God will never work, because no one can ever keep all of God's law all the time.

Instead, everyone sins and keeps sinning, and so slides down the snake. Early in Romans, Paul showed us this. After almost three chapters, he concluded on your screens, Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin.

[5 : 14] Therefore, notice, no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law. Rather, the law just tells us how sinful we are because we keep breaking it.

You see, this road to righteousness doesn't work. And so traveling down it means missing out on being right with God and safe from judgment. I remember when my wife and I were not long married and we moved to a new suburb.

We were looking for a place to rent. The market was tight. So when we found a good apartment, we didn't want to miss out on it. But the way to the open for inspection that day, on the way, one of us tried to take a shortcut to get there early.

I won't say which one of us because it was me. Let's say it was a tense time in our marriage and I thank God for Google Maps now. But because I chose the wrong way to the rental place, we got lost and missed out on the apartment.

Well, so too for Israel. Because they chose the wrong road to righteousness, they ended up lost and at the moment are missing out on it. You see, there really is only one right road to righteousness.

[6 : 35] And that's by faith in Jesus. But Israel just couldn't bring themselves to do it. They couldn't believe Jesus was actually the Christ, the Messiah.

They found him too offensive. So verse 32, 33 on your screens, they stumbled over Jesus, the stumbling stone. As it is written, See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall or literally causes offense.

But the one who believes in him will never be put to shame. Jesus was the rock that made Israel fall or literally a rock of offense. They were offended by Jesus.

And you see that in the Gospels, don't you? They couldn't accept that this Jesus was God's promised King or Messiah. They couldn't believe that a crucified man could possibly be their Savior. They stumbled over Jesus. And so they chose to reject this road to righteousness. But it means they're lost and will miss out on it, which continues to pain Paul.

[7 : 47] Dreamer, last week on your screens, Paul said, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. Well, this week in our passage, chapter 10, verse 1, he says, Brothers and sisters, 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 knowing. You see, Paul's desire and prayer is still, this week, for Israel to be saved, especially because they really do want to serve God.

He says they are zealous for God. They're just going about it the wrong way. Verse 3, Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own by works, they did not submit to God's righteousness in Christ.

Now, when it says in verse 3, they did not know, Paul is actually talking about a willful ignorance or them ignoring it. Remember, they did know about Jesus.

And later on in the chapter, Paul will say they did understand the gospel. They just couldn't accept Jesus. He was a stumbling stone, remember. And so despite the evidence, they just ignored faith in Christ as a way to righteousness.

[9 : 13] They refused to seriously consider him. It's like when you really don't want to do something, so you decide not to think too seriously about it, so you can plead ignorance.

For example, you don't want to wear a mask, so you decide not to listen to the latest rules, so that you can say, I didn't know we had to wear masks. Now, I loathe masks too, but that's willful ignorance, isn't it?

So you can do what you want, and which for Israel was choosing not to submit to God's way of righteousness, but do their own way.

But the problem with trying to earn your own righteousness is not only the fact that you can't keep God's law all the time perfectly, it's now no longer even an option.

Verse 4, Christ is the culmination of the law, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. The culmination of the law in the sense that he's both the goal and the end.

[10 : 18] You see, the law pointed to Jesus as its goal, and it was fulfilled in Jesus, which meant he ended it, fulfilled it, completed it.

And so trying to make yourself righteous by keeping the law is no longer even an option. Even if you could keep it, Christ has come and ended that road to righteousness.

A few weeks ago, I gave my son his first ever driving lesson. I'm not sure who was more scared, him or me. But your learners is not the goal, is it? Nor is it your provisional license. Rather, on your screens, the goal is the full license at the end. That's the goal, isn't it? And when you get to that goal, it ends your L plates and red peas and green peas.

In fact, I think Vic Rhodes even takes your previous learner's license, the card, away from you, or at least punch a hole in it so that you can't use it anymore.

[11 : 22] Well, so too with Christ. Jesus was the goal, and when he came, he ended that way of righteousness through the law. So even if someone could earn righteousness by keeping every law of God's, it's now not even an option.

Christ has come. Which means, by the way, all roads do not lead to God. You know how people say that? You know, all religions lead to God, all roads lead to God.

They don't. There is only one right road now that Jesus has come. It's believing in him. But why did God do this?

Why take away the law as an option? Was he trying to make it harder for everyone by limiting our options, having just one way? Well, no. He was actually making it easier for everyone.

Do you see the end of verse 4? That there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Because anyone can believe, can't they?

[12 : 28] And this was God's plan even in the Old Testament. Verse 5, Moses writes this about righteousness that is by the law the other way. The person who does these things will live by them.

That is, the person who keeps the whole law will live rightly with God. But as we've seen, no one can and that way has ended anyway.

Rather, God has always had the faith way in mind. So verse 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, 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 message concerning faith that we proclaim.

Here Paul quotes from our first reading from Deuteronomy. And in that first reading, Moses was actually talking about God's law that he had given Israel.

[13 : 35] And it describes how accessible God's law was for Israel. Israel didn't have to go up into heaven to get it because, do you remember, God came down in the cloud at Mount Sinai and proclaimed it to them.

And so the law was right there in front of Israel, in their mouths or in their hearts, that they could obey it or might obey it. But God's word of the law always pointed to God's living word, Jesus.

And as we saw, Jesus ended the law, fulfilled it, replaced it. And so Paul can replace the law with Christ here and say the message about Christ is also just as accessible.

For we don't have to ascend up to heaven and get Christ to come down to us. He already has, hasn't he? And we don't have to descend to the deep and raise Christ up from the dead.

He already has, hasn't he? We have eyewitness accounts of his life, death and resurrection. So like the law was accessible, so too is this message of Christ.

[14 : 50] It's right in front of us, in our mouths and in our hearts, so to speak, that close to us. And what does this accessible message say? Well, verse 9, that 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.

For it's with your heart that you believe and are justified or made right with God. And it's with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. Now, to believe in your heart and to profess with your mouth both really mean the same thing.

It means to genuinely believe. After all, you only profess with your mouth something controversial if you genuinely believed it, wouldn't you?

Like iPhones are better than Androids. I mean, that's pretty controversial these days, isn't it? Or Maccas is better than Hungry Jacks. Or black tea is better than bubble tea.

I had actually heard of what bubble tea was until this week. You'd only confess one is better than the other if you genuinely believed it. How much more so with this?

[15 : 59] And to believe in your heart is also talking about genuinely believing too, isn't it? It's all about believing in Jesus. This is righteousness by faith.

This is how to become a Christian. How to be made right with God, saved from judgment for life, eternal. That if we believe Jesus is Lord, that he really did die for our sins, that he really did rise from the dead, such that we want to follow him as our Lord, then we will be saved.

And this righteousness by faith was always there in the Old Testament. Do you see verse 11? Paul explains for or because as scripture, that's the Old Testament word, scripture, says, anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame, that is, be saved.

You see, this was God's plan all along, not to make it harder for us, but to make it easier, because anyone can believe, can't they? And so everyone can be saved.

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

[17:24] For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. You see, this road to righteousness is open to everyone, for anyone can believe in Jesus and be saved.

one of the most genuinely joyful moments in my life was when my son was four years old and he said to me, Dad, I believe in Jesus.

It was brilliant. And that simple belief made him right with God. Now, he may have been a Christian before that, he may have believed before that, who knows, but the point is the way to be right with God is so simple that even a four-year-old child can do it.

God has made righteousness more easily available to everyone for anyone can believe, but Israel simply chose not to.

Point three, verse 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?

[18:39] And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.

Now, before we get to Israel, Paul outlines what people need in order to be saved, in order to call on the name of the Lord. But he kind of works backwards, doesn't he?

So if we kind of flip it around on your screens, there's a bit of a chain of how it works. People are sent, and then they speak, others hear, believe, and call on Christ's name, which is effectively, genuinely believing, and so are saved.

But I think Paul works backwards in our passage to highlight that missionary verse at the end of verse 15, which literally says, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news.

For as we'll see next week in chapter 11, Paul still holds out hope for Israel. Paul still wants mission to Israel. But also notice it's not enough to live Christianly.

[19:55] People at some point need to speak the word about Christ so that people can hear, believe, and be saved. But the problem for Israel is verse 16.

But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our message?

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word about Christ. You see, not all Israel are saved because not all Israel accepted the good news.

Why not? Was it because they didn't have a chance to hear the word about Christ? Well, verse 18, but I asked, did they not hear? Of course they did.

Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. And now Paul exaggerates a bit here, ends of the world.

[20:58] God's word going out. But Paul certainly has spent years proclaiming the gospel, hasn't he?

To the ends of the Roman empire, which was the known world. And wherever he went, he'd always go to the Jewish synagogue first, and then to the Gentiles second.

In fact, in chapter 15, on your screens there, his goal is always to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, but now he says there's no more place for him to work in these regions.

Why? Because they've all heard the gospel. You see, Israel has heard about Jesus. Okay, then they've heard, well, was it that they didn't understand?

Verse 19, on the next slide, verse 19, again I ask, did Israel not understand? first Moses says, I will make you envious by those who are not a nation.

[21:59] I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding. And as Isaiah boldly says, I was found by those who did not seek me. I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.

Paul again quotes from the Old Testament to say that Israel did understand, they did know, because it was predicted in the Old Testament that those who were not a nation, the Gentiles would come to God, that those who did not seek God would find God.

So Israel knew there was a time when the Messiah would come and the Gentiles would be included, which would make them envious and angry. And that's exactly what we see happen in the book of Acts, isn't it?

As Gentiles believe in Jesus and become part of Paul was saying.

They even knew from the Old Testaments it would happen, but like back in verse 3, they just refused to seriously consider it. And so in verse 16, they stubbornly refused to accept it, which is why our passage ends in verse 21, with God saying, all day long, I've held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people.

[23 : 24] God graciously continues to hold out his hand to Israel through the gospel, but they continue to stubbornly reject it. Yes, they've heard it.

Yes, they understand it. Yes, they have a real choice to believe it, but they choose to reject it. And so here are the two answers for why all Israel are not saved.

Last week, God has not chosen all Israel to receive mercy. And this week, all Israel has not chosen to believe it themselves.

Both answers are true. As I said last week, 100% God's choice, 100% our choice, bad maths, good theology. And both these answers sit side by side in these two chapters, don't they?

We may not understand how they fit together, but that's because we're not God, which is a good thing. Though notice there is an order.

[24 : 26] Paul puts God's choice in chapter 9 before our choice in chapter 10 because actually God chooses us before he enables us to choose him. But the point of today's chapter is that we do have a real choice to believe or not.

And so given I don't know who's tuning in, can I ask you, have you chosen to believe in Jesus? For as we saw, it's the only way to be right with God, saved from judgment for life, eternal.

As Paul put it on your screens, 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. But if you don't, then you won't be saved.

So have you chosen to believe in Jesus? And for us who have, then will we do what we can to help people exercise their real choice to believe?

How? Well, there's a few ways, but our passage highlights two, one we've seen already last week. so remember what Paul continues to do back in verse one, he continues to pray for those who are not yet saved, doesn't he?

[25 : 50] As I said last week, we can pray for people and then sometimes other things come into our lives which demand our prayers and so we can stop until we're reminded to again. It kind of goes in cycles like that, that's okay, but here is another reminder tonight, to pray for those who are not yet saved.

And the second thing we see from our passage is will we do what we can to have beautiful feet?

And not by clipping our toenails or putting on nail polish, for the record I don't put on nail polish, but as it's written on the slide, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news.

And so do we have those kind of beautiful feet, both as an individual and as a church. As a church we can serve or give to support gospel proclamation through the church, both locally and globally, and I know many of you do that, it's terrific, thank you.

But we can also do it as individuals, we can speak the gospel. Now of course we need to back it up by living genuine Christian lives, and speaking the gospel will look different for each of us, because we all have different personalities and different gifts, some can do more of it, some can do less, that's okay, but we are still all to make the most of the opportunities God gives us.

For example, when something happens to a work colleague or a friend or a family, why not use it as an opportunity to ask if you can pray for them? People hardly ever knock back prayer, and you don't know what doors that may open to say something more.

[27 : 37] Or, if the conversation turns to the mess of our world like it is in with COVID, then use it as an opportunity to say that's why Jesus came, to bring us life in a new world, to come, which will be COVID-free creation.

Or, as one of our 9amers did a while ago, she said to me, all she seems to be doing these days is going to doctor's appointments, and it was around the time of Easter, and so she decided to make the most of the opportunity, both of Easter and going to the doctor, and she asked her doctor whether Easter was a special time for him.

He replied, no, I don't believe in that stuff, and then she said, oh, what stuff? And he kind of struggled to recall the Christian message, and every now and again she would chime in, oh, do you mean this, just to correct him?

And by the end of the conversation, she had shared the gospel by getting him to retell it. It was brilliant. Now, we may not all be able to do that, and I know when we try, our hearts pound and our tongues get tied, it happens to me too, and then afterwards we walk away and wish, oh, I could have said that, or I should have said this, that's okay.

God can still use our efforts to save others, big or small efforts, but we should at least have a go, because whether as individuals or as a church, we are to have beautiful feet, so people can hear, for people have a very real choice to believe.

[29 : 18] Let's pray they would, let's pray. God, we thank you again for this passage in your word tonight. We thank you that it reminds us that people do have a very real choice to believe, and so we pray that you would help us to do all we can to exercise that choice to believe.

Help us to be prayerful for them, that you may soften their hearts, and please give us opportunities to speak to them, that they may hear of the Lord Jesus, call on his name and be saved.

Help us to do this, we pray, not for our glory, but for yours. In Jesus' name, Amen.