

The Responsibility of People

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- [0 : 0 0] Father, thanks so much for your word, the Bible. Thank you that you continue to speak to us through it. And Father, we pray that as you do, that we would remember that what you have to say is still very much relevant for us today.
- And so please, please give us minds that would understand. Give us hearts as well that would live in light of it. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.
- Well, when one of my daughters was younger, she came home from kinder and she told us about an argument she had with another child at kinder, which disturbed us as parents.
- You never want to hear your kids arguing at kinder at that age. But anyway, they were arguing over who the boss of the playground was, whether it was my daughter or this other girl, who was also equally strong-willed.
- Each said they were the boss. And then in an effort to win the argument, to clinch the argument, my daughter said, well, actually, Jesus is the boss. Hmm.
- [1 : 0 3] And then walked away. And so she won it. Now, I like the fact that she knows that. I'm not sure I like the fact that she uses it to win an argument. But it is interesting watching your kids grow up as Christians, isn't it?
- And sometimes you also feel for them as they try and live out their faith. So on another occasion, when Tim was in prep at a different school, he came home a bit concerned about a school friend of his.
- And this is the question he asked. He asked, why doesn't Kevin go to church? By which he meant, why isn't Kevin, my friend Kevin, a Christian? And your heart goes out, doesn't it?
- But how do you answer that? Because it's not just Tim's friend who is not a Christian. And in a Christian, it's some of our friends and our family who are not Christians, who are not saved from Judgment Day.
- And it's this issue that has sparked these chapters in Romans 9 to 11. Because not all Israelites are saved. And they were supposed to be.
- [2 : 0 5] They were supposed to be God's very people. Yet most of them were not Christians. So how are we going to answer that? People said to Paul. And we saw last week that the first half of Paul's answer from chapter 9 was that, well, God hasn't chosen them all to be saved.
- So have a look in your Bibles at chapter 9, verse 8. He says, It is not the children by physical descent who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise, that is, God has chosen by promise, who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.
- So even though the whole nation of Israel were known as God's people, we're told that it wasn't all physical Israelites who were truly God's people. Just like us Australians, as I said last week, people overseas think that Australia is a Christian country.
- But we know just because you're born in Australia, you're not necessarily a Christian. It's only those who are chosen by God's word or promise. Like Jacob, for example. Do you remember?

Have a look at verse 11, for example. It says, Yet before the twins were born, that is, Jacob and Esau, or had done anything good or bad, notice, in order that God's purpose in election, choosing, might stand, not by works, but by him who calls, she was told the older will serve the younger.

[3 : 29] Just as it is written, Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated. You see, being saved is about being chosen or elected by God to receive mercy. It's not about which country you're born into or how good a person you are.

And so Paul says in verse 16 of chapter 9, And so why are not all Israelites saved?

Well, the first part of the answer is because God has only chosen some to receive mercy. Now, this answer we saw raised all sorts of objections, like how is that fair? And we saw Paul's reply to some of those objections last week.

If you missed it, then you can listen online. But this is only half the answer to why all Israel are not saved. The other half of the answer is because not all Israelites believed.

And this is what we see today in chapter 10. And now to help you understand today's passage, you need to remember what the word righteousness refers to, because that word comes up a little bit. So on the next slide, righteousness equals being declared right with God.

[4 : 36] It doesn't mean you're perfect. We still sin, but it means being declared right with God. It means being forgiven of sins. It means being saved from the punishment or the judgment we deserve.

Now, there are different ways we're talking about what happens to us when we become a Christian. But the problem for Israel is that they chose the wrong road to this righteousness, which brings us to point one in your outlines and chapter nine, verse 30 in your Bibles.

So have a look at there. It says, What then shall we say? That the Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have actually obtained it, and a righteousness that is by faith.

But the people of Israel who pursued the law as a way of righteousness have not attained their goal. Do you see what he's saying? The shocking news is that Gentiles who are not God's people, Gentiles means non-Jew, Gentiles who are not God's people, who do not even pursue righteousness, who didn't even try and make themselves right with God, well, they've actually been made right with God.

But the Jews, on the other hand, who did pursue righteousness, who did try and make themselves right with God, well, they've missed it. They have not attained it, he says. Why not?

[5 : 52] Or verse 32. He says, Why not? Well, because they pursued it not by faith, but as if it were by works, he says.

Do you see what he's saying? The reason the Jews did not receive righteousness, the reason they were not made right with God and saved, is because they tried to earn it by works, by doing stuff.

They tried to earn it by keeping God's law, instead of having faith in God's Son, Jesus. And the first problem with this is that no one can keep God's law completely. I mean, Paul has gone to great lengths to point this out in the earlier chapters of Romans.

And so on the next slide, we've got a couple of verses. Paul points out in chapter 2, It is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey, do the law, who will be declared righteous.

And then he says to the Jews, You Jews who boast in the law, you actually dishonor God by breaking the law. You see, the Jews couldn't even keep it. And so on the next slide, Paul says, What shall we conclude then?

[6 : 58] Are we any better? Are we Jews any better? Not at all. We've already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. And so that means, therefore, no one will be declared right with God by works of the law.

Do you see what he's saying? No one can keep it, even the Jews. Therefore, no one is going to be declared right with God by doing good works, by keeping the law. So you're trying to make yourself right with God, trying to be righteous in his sight by doing works of the law, it will never work because no one can keep the law completely.

Rather, everyone breaks God's law from time to time. Everyone sins. So for the Jews to try and make themselves right with God by keeping the law, it will never work because they cannot do it. You see, it's the wrong way, the wrong road to righteousness.

And traveling down that law road only means missing out on righteousness. It's kind of like when Michelle and I were recently married and we'd not long moved to Sydney for work.

We were on our way to an open house of a place that we wanted to rent. Now, the market was tight, and so we didn't want to miss this apartment. But one of us tried to take a shortcut.

[8 : 11] I'm not going to say which one, because it was me. It was a tense time in our marriage. I thank God for Google Maps now. But because I chose the wrong road to the rental property, we ended up lost and we missed out on it.

Well, so too for Israel. Because they chose the wrong road to righteousness, they ended up lost and missed out on it. They missed out on being right with God, and they're still lost today.

You see, there really is only one right road to righteousness, and that is by believing in Jesus, having faith, trusting in him. Which means, by the way, that all roads do not lead to God.

Sometimes you hear people say that, don't you? All religions get you to God in the end. It's just different roads, different ways. But actually, the Bible says there's only one right road. Yet Israel just couldn't bring themselves to trust in Jesus, in going down that road.

And so Jesus became a stumbling stone for them. Do you see the rest of verse 32? He says, They stumbled over the stumbling stone, that is Jesus. As it is written, See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble, and a rock that literally causes offence.

[9 : 25] And the one who believes in him, though, will never be put to shame. In other words, they stumbled over Jesus. Jesus was the rock that made them fall, or the rock they took offence at.

You only have to read through the Gospels to see how Jesus offended them. And not always intentionally. They could not accept that this Jesus was actually God's promised king. That guy?

Are you serious? They could not believe in a man who was crucified on a cross, that that man could actually be the saviour. And so they rejected Jesus.

They rejected that road to righteousness. They refused to believe in Jesus. And that means they're not saved. And this continues to cause Paul great grief and distress.

You see chapter 10, verse 1, he says, Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire, what I long for, and my prayer to God for the Israelites, is that they may be saved.

[10 : 22] That's what he wants. That's what he longs for. But the problem is, they're just not going to be unless they trust in Jesus.

And yet Paul keeps praying that they might come to this knowledge. Because, verse 3, he can testify about them, that they are zealous for God. But their zeal is not based on knowledge.

You see, they long to please God, but their zeal is misplaced. It's directed to keeping the law, to try and make themselves right with God, instead of, well, submitting to God's righteousness in Jesus, instead of trusting, believing in Jesus.

And so, the rest of verse 3, Since they did not know the righteousness of God, and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. That is, to believing in Jesus, and being made right with God that way.

Now, when it says they did not know, Paul is talking about a willful ignorance, not an innocent ignorance. It's kind of like a not-knowing excuse that sometimes my kids give me.

[11 : 30] Sometimes we catch them watching TV on a school morning, which in our house they're not allowed to, because TV turns them into zombies, and they sit there and forget to get ready for school, and so on.

And when we catch them with the TV on, they say, Oh, but I didn't know we weren't allowed to. Of course they knew. They'd just deliberately forgotten.

They'd refused to think about it. And it's the same for the Jews. They preferred to establish their own righteousness through the law, by being good, or trying to be good. And so they refused to submit to God's righteousness through Jesus.

I've already seen one problem with trying to make ourselves right with God's law. We just can't keep it. We can't keep it completely. But there is another problem, and that's in verse 4.

Verse 4 says, Christ is the culmination of the law, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. See, Christ is the fulfillment of the law.

[12 : 29] Jesus is the goal and end of the law. Now that Jesus has come, the law has been fulfilled, so trying to make yourself righteous by keeping the law, it's no longer an option.

Even if you could keep it, Christ has come and ended that road to righteousness. It's kind of like when those Mikey cards came out. Do you remember on the next slide? I've got a new version out now, the grey one.

But when those cards came out, the paper tickets that you used to use ceased, didn't they? You could no longer use them. It was no longer an option. Well, so too, now that Christ has come, the law has ceased as an option.

You cannot even try and be right with God by keeping the law, because Christ has fulfilled it. It's no longer an option, even if you could keep it. You see, there really is only one way to be made right with God, which is believing in Jesus.

But why did God do that? Why take away law as an option? Why make only one way to be right with him? Was he trying to make it harder for everyone, you know, limiting our choices?

[13 : 33] Well, actually, no. He was trying to make it easier. Do you see the end of verse 4? Christ is a combination of the law, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

See, this righteousness that we can now have is accessible to everyone, not just those who have the law. And Paul reminds us, in verse 5, of the two different roads to righteousness and how one is more accessible than the other.

Do you see verse 5? He says, He says, If you want to be right with God through the law, then you have to keep the law.

You have to live it out. And this is the same in all other religions, by the way. You have to do this, or you have to do that to earn your way to heaven. But no one can do anything perfectly all the time.

What's more, us Gentiles or non-Jews, we don't even have the law. So it's not very accessible for us, this law road to righteousness, is it? So it's not very easy for us to keep the law and earn our way to heaven.

[14 : 44] And so God has chosen another way to be right with him, which we can do, which everyone can do. And this way is righteousness by faith. See verse 6? It says, Verse 6, But the righteousness that is by faith says, It did not say in your hearts who will ascend to 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? Well, the word is near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart. That is the message concerning faith that we proclaim.

I hear Paul uses the Old Testament, which we heard in our first reading, where Moses spoke to Israel about the law. And he said the law was in front of them, it was in their mouth, in their heart, it was accessible.

And Paul applies that now to the gospel. He says, Well, Christ has fulfilled the law. And the gospel message is accessible. We don't have to go up into heaven and bring Christ down to hear it.

He's already come down to earth. We don't have to go down into the deep and get him to raise up again from the dead. He's already done that. It's right there. It's easy. It's near us. It's easily accessible.

[15 : 52] The word of the gospel can be heard by anyone and everyone. And what's more, it's not a matter of keeping the whole law perfectly, which no one could do anyway. It's a matter of belief, which everyone can do if they choose.

It's kind of like what we saw with Simon before. It's no longer about having to go, you know, keep the law and you go up and down in life. It's about trusting in Jesus, which puts you above the line the whole time.

So verse nine, the verse that Simon reminds us of, if you declare with your mouth, this is the message that is accessible to everyone. 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 is with your heart that you believe and are justified or made right. And it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. You see the message about Jesus that he died and rose again for us, that he paid for our sins so that we could be forgiven, saved from judgment.

That message is easily accessible and everyone can believe it. You see, while no one could do the law perfectly, everyone can believe in Jesus if they choose to.

[17 : 06] So by opening this road to righteousness, the road of believing in Jesus, God has actually opened up the way to be right with him for everyone, not just the Jews who had the law. And so he says in verse 11, as scripture says, notice, anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. The same Lord is the Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

See what he's saying? One of my most genuinely joyful moments in my life was when my son, Tim, at age four, said to me during family prayer time, Dad, I believe in Jesus.

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

And in this way, God has made righteousness available for everyone and anyone if they would only but believe. Yet Israel chose not to.

[18 : 21] Point three, verse 14. It says, How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? And as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. 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.

See, here Paul begins by acknowledging that if you want to believe, you first need to hear. And to hear, someone needs to first speak the word of Christ. Notice, though, it is the word of Christ that saves, not as social justice or caring for the environment, though we should definitely do those things.

And to speak this word of Christ, someone needs to be sent. And so you get that great missionary verse about how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. And we'll come back to that. But here, Paul applies this to Israel.

[19 : 26] Just in case someone had said, well, Israel hasn't heard the gospel. They haven't had a chance to believe. And so Paul asks in verse 18, 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 is exaggerating a bit here, ends of the world, but he has spent years going around proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the Roman Empire, the known world at that time.

And what's more, he's speaking about the Jews here. Whenever he came to a town, he would always go to the Jewish synagogue first and proclaim the gospel. And in fact, by chapter 15 of Romans, he says he's planning to go to Spain now because in his words, there is no more place for me to work in these regions.

Everyone has heard the gospel from me. So they have heard. Israel has heard the gospel message about Jesus. Or maybe they didn't understand then. Verse 19, he says, well, again, I asked, did Israel not understand?

Well, first Moses says, I will make you envious by those who are not a nation. I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding. And Isaiah boldly says, I was found by those who did not seek me and I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.

[20 : 39] Now, these verses are a bit tricky to understand, but he's saying that they, Israel did understand if they wanted to know. What did they know? Well, they knew the Old Testament scriptures like those verses and how they predicted God would act like this.

They knew it. They had their Bibles. They just refused to accept it. They refused to acknowledge it. They're like my kids watching TV in the morning. They said, oh, but we didn't know. Yet they did.

They had their Old Testaments which showed them, yet they stubbornly ignored it. And so that's where Paul finishes this chapter in verse 21. But concerning Israel, he says, all day long, I've held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate or stubborn people.

You see, why are most of Israel not saved? Well, because most of Israel stubbornly refuse to believe. That's why. It's like what Paul said in verse 16.

Not all Israel are saved because not all Israel believed the good news. And so can you see now the two halves to Paul's answer of why not all Israel are saved?

[21 : 44] That's the issue that we've been looking at over the last two weeks. Chapter 9, we're told not all Israel are saved because God has not chosen all Israel to have mercy. But in chapter 10, we're told not all Israel are saved because not all Israel choose to believe.

Both answers are true. As I said last week, 100% God's choice, 100% people's choice. Bad maths, good theology. And both these answers sit side by side in the Bible.

You know, chapter 9, next to chapter 10. Though there is an order. Paul puts God's choice in chapter 9 before our choice in chapter 10 because God chooses us before we are enabled to choose him.

But what does all this mean for us? Well, three final implications. The first is, we've seen that there's only one road to righteousness, only one way to be made right with God, haven't we?

And that way is by believing in Jesus. The Jews tried to make themselves right with God by doing good things, keeping the law, but they couldn't keep the law completely.

[22 : 53] Yet people still try and do this today. I mean, society teaches us that if you want anything in life, you have to work hard to earn it. That's what society says, isn't it? And so that's what people try and do with God.

In fact, the first ever game of snakes and ladders in Australia was in 1905 and it actually taught this, believe it or not. So on the next slide, I think, that's what the game kind of looked like and you can see the massive snakes and the little ladders.

But on the next slide, I think there's a close-up. So on the next slide, next one, that's it. Yeah, yeah, that one, that one, that's it.

Okay, now look at the bottom, square number eight. If you want a ladder up, what do you have to have? Penitence, repentance, that's what you have to have. So if you do that, you get up the ladder, you get closer to God.

Or the next slide, I think, Paul, or square number 62, if you have faith, you can get up the ladder. Well, that's actually kind of right, isn't it? If you have faith in Jesus, that's the one that works.

[23 : 56] But if you look at number 83, if you have anger, what happens? You go down the snake, away from God. Or the next one, I think there's one more. So I like number 48, square 48, unpunctuality.

There you go, 1030 church. No, no, I know it's a car parking issue. And if you're unpunctual, you go down away from God. Okay? And then over on the far side, obedience, you go up, and so on.

You see, we were taught this, 9805, that if you want to be right with God, if you want to get up the ladder, you have to do good stuff. And if you do bad stuff, well, you go down the snake, very Genesis 3, isn't it?

Down the snake, away from God. But that's not the case, is it? As we heard from Simon this morning, in fact, as we heard from God, more importantly, sorry, Simon, that it's not about what we do, it's about what Jesus has done.

It's not about us trying to keep the law, or do good stuff, because we can never do enough. And more than that, Jesus has come and ended that way as an option. No, it's about believing or trusting in Jesus.

[25 : 08] That's the only way to be made right with God. And so can I ask, have you done that? Because that's the second thing we learn, and really the big point of this chapter, that people like Israel have a real choice.

They can choose whether to believe or not, so have you. And we've got visitors here today, it's great to have you with us, but it means I don't know where everyone sits with God.

So I need to ask you, have you put your faith in Jesus? It's the only way to be made right with God, to have certainty of heaven, to have assurance, as Simon said. As Paul says, if you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

The flip side, of course, is if you don't believe, then you won't be saved. So have you chosen to believe? That's the second thing. And the third thing that we learn from this chapter is that people can only choose to believe in Jesus, if they hear about Jesus.

As Paul says, faith comes from hearing the message, and how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. You see, if Jesus is the only way to be right with God, and anyone can believe if they choose to, then what are we willing to do to make sure that they hear about Jesus?

[26 : 34] Or to put it differently, are our feet beautiful? Not are our toenails painted and feet free from bunions or whatever.

But are we seeking to bring the good news of Jesus to others? And we can do this in all sorts of ways, can't we? As parents, we can share it with our kids. As members of a family, we can share it with our relatives.

As independent adults, we can pray for opportunities to share it with our neighbors. As workers, we can give money to support missionaries or uni workers, like Marty, for example, to share it with others.

These are some of the ways we can help make disciples. But it will look different for different people, because we all have different personalities with different opportunities. Yet as Christians, we are all called to do what we can.

We are all called to do two things. In fact, one, live authentic Christian lives in the world, in front of the world, so that people will see that we are different. A lady from our church actually passed away on Friday morning from a terrible disease.

[27 : 38] Yet despite her severe suffering, the staff at both hospitals she was in for the last year and a half knew that she was different, knew she was a Christian.

In fact, one hospital, Manningham Centre up the road here, had several staff who commented to the husband that they were impressed by how this woman lived her last days, and how many people from the church visited.

You see, we had to live such authentic Christian lives that people notice, because then they ask about Christianity. Some of the people from that hospital are now coming to the funeral this Thursday.

And both the husband and I rejoice in that. Now, the second thing we are to do, not just live authentic Christian lives, but the second thing we are to do is to make the most of every opportunity that comes, being prepared to give an answer for why we are Christian, but to do so with gentleness and respect.

And so another lady from the nine o'clock church was telling me about how she visited her doctor. She said that's all she seems to do these days, visit doctors. And it was around Easter time, just gone.

[28 : 43] And so she asked him if Easter was a special time for him. And the doctor said, no, I don't really believe in all that stuff. And she asked, well, what stuff? And so he said, he tried to recall the Christian message.

He kind of said, oh, well, you know, stuff about Jesus and how he died on the cross. And if he got something wrong, the woman would say, oh, you mean, and he kind of died for our sins. Oh yeah, that's right. And he actually ended up evangelizing himself.

He actually told the gospel to himself. This woman knew exactly what she was doing. She took the opportunity and she made the most of it. For others, when something happens to their friends, they ask if they can pray for them.

Hardly anyone is willing to turn down prayer. Whatever it is, we had to try to make the most of opportunities to live and speak in front of others, such that we might lead.

So it might lead to a gospel conversation. For as we've seen, faith in Jesus is the only way to be right with God. And anyone can choose to believe if they want. So everyone needs to hear the message about him.

[29 : 46] Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for this chapter, which reminds us that salvation is open to everyone who believes.

And so father, we pray that you would help us. Help those here this morning who may not yet believe to believe. And help us who do believe to make the most of opportunities to share this message with others, that they too may believe and have life.

We pray it in Jesus name. Amen.