

God's Voice

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[0 : 00] Well, we're looking at Romans chapter 10. We're continuing our series on Romans and we're looking at verses 14 through 21, as it says.

But Craig must have somehow had advanced knowledge that I was wanting to preach beginning on 13. So thank you, Craig, for reading that. It's a very important verse for us.

And it's important for us and very timely also that this is Palm Sunday. Because Palm Sunday is a day, as Keith was telling the children, that people from Jerusalem went out to the outskirts to welcome Jesus in as their king.

And they shouted, Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the king of Israel. This was their shout. It was joyful and it was heartfelt.

And that word Hosanna meant something very, very significant. It wasn't an inarticulate shout like like would be made after the Canucks score a goal.

[1 : 05] If you ask people in a stadium when they when they yell or in front of their TV, ask them, what did it mean what you said after that goal? Most people wouldn't be able to articulate very well what the word meant.

It's just an inarticulate cry. But Hosanna is not like hooray or yes. It means, as Keith said, save us now we pray.

Save us please, oh God. And it is a cry from the heart for God to save us. And that word Hosanna, in one word, brings together the purpose of God in this world.

In that word, we see what God is about here. He wants every person in the world to cry Hosanna. Save us now we pray, Lord Jesus.

And that promise in verse 13 shows us this. It says it's from Joel, from the Old Testament. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

[2 : 12] There's God's purpose for the world. That God, that everyone should call on the name of the Lord and that God would save them. And wonderfully here, we see what all the Old Testament prophets were asking that people would call on the name of the Lord.

Paul brings Jesus into that place of Lord. They're calling upon God, upon Yahweh. Here, clearly in the context, Paul is saying God wants everyone to call on Jesus, who is God and Lord.

Look back at verse 9. It says, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, you will be saved. Jesus is God who saves us. And then in verse 12, it says, there's no distinction between Jew and Greek.

For the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. That, because Jesus is Lord of all people in all of their diversity, and the differences between Jews and Gentiles was massive.

This means Jesus can and does save every kind of person in every kind of place. Jesus fulfills God's purposes for the world.

[3 : 34] And that means there is no one in this church today, no one in your life, no one in all the world who is beyond Jesus' power to save.

This is what Paul is telling us. This is the great truth. And this is a massive encouragement to us, because I know that many of you, many of us, have friends and family that do not know God and don't have peace with God.

Verse 12 is saying Jesus is Lord of each person in your life, that he bestows his blessings from heaven on everyone who calls on him. And that truth moves us to keep praying to Jesus for our friends who seem far away from God, for our family who may have wandered away from him, to even pray for those who, like Paul before his conversion, seek to tear down this faith that saves us.

This is the gift of Jesus being Lord of all, bestowing his riches on anyone who calls. And what this tells us, it reminds us of two incredibly inclusive truths that Romans tells us.

That everyone, without exception, is under God's wrath and judgment because of sin. All of us have been under this. No amounts of good works can change this.

[5 : 04] But Romans also tells us the good news that absolutely every person who calls on the name of Jesus will be saved, because Jesus will give him, them, his righteousness, and adopt them as God's child by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So there's God's great vision statement for the world. Everyone should call upon Jesus and be saved. That's why God sent Jesus. It's a vision that encompasses the whole world and even the most unlikely people that we know.

And that vision statement needs to always be the main agenda of every church, including St. John's. And there are constant pressures to take us away from that main purpose of God, that people should call upon the name of the Lord and be saved.

And that brings us to verses 14 and 15, which I want to focus on, because they're crucial for us in understanding how God accomplishes that purpose of saving all people who call on Jesus.

Paul teaches us about that process in four rhetorical questions. And the first of them is in verse 14. He says, Paul is teaching us how crucial it is to have faith, because when you call upon the Lord Jesus, you are entrusting yourself to him.

[6 : 36] You're giving your life away. So you have to believe he is worth giving up your life for. Paul says in chapter 6 very graphically, he says that the old self that lived apart from God is crucified in Jesus.

It is killed. And you present yourself as a slave to God. And you walk in newness of life, freedom from sin, but a life of obedience to God.

It is giving away your life to Christ. And you can't do this unless you have faith that Jesus died for your sins. And that he is the risen Lord of all.

That he is one who is worth worshipping, giving your life to. And that's why our evangelism must be based on teaching what the gospel is and who Jesus is.

Because calling on the name of the Lord must come out of a faith in Jesus Christ. Secondly, Paul asked this question, verse 14 again, And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?

[7 : 46] Now in order to have the kind of faith I just described, you must hear. And it's not just a general hearing. Verse 17 defines what that hearing is. It says there that faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Through the word that is Jesus speaking. And the word about Jesus. And that makes sense. You can only believe in a person if he speaks to you.

If you know something about them. Jesus said in John 10, I am the good shepherd. And what does the good shepherd do? My sheep hear my voice.

The shepherd speaks to his sheep. And I know them. And they follow me. And I give them eternal life. They will never perish. And no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Now where do we hear Jesus' voice? Because Jesus is speaking not just to people in first century Palestine. People in 2011 need to hear the voice of Jesus speaking to them.

[8 : 51] How do we hear it? Well, it is through the Bible. The Bible is the living word of Christ. Jesus speaks to you and me personally through it. This is our great belief as we preach and as we read God's word together as a church.

It's true as you first become a Christian. And it is true for your whole life in Christ. God builds and strengthens our faith as we listen to his word.

Because Jesus speaks to us. Personally, the living God through it. Then thirdly, the third part. How are they to hear without someone preaching?

So Paul is saying you must have a preacher in order to hear. And Paul is saying when someone faithfully preaches what is in the Bible, you don't just hear about Jesus.

You're actually hearing the voice of Jesus speaking to you. And that is the work of the Holy Spirit. We should expect to hear this as we listen to sermons.

[9 : 55] And I want to say now that it's very important. I'm saying it somewhat selfishly. But it's very important to pray that the preacher, whoever it is who is preaching, will be faithful to the Lord Jesus and his word.

Pray that Jesus will speak to you as you hear God's word. Expect to hear his voice. And that the whole congregation would hear it as well.

Pray for the preacher as they prepare. There are many things that preachers, every preacher, goes through if they are faithful. There are pressures to be discouraged, to be distracted, to be disrupted as you prepare to preach God's word.

Pray for the preacher throughout the week. It was wonderful to hear Merv and his remembrance of Harry Robinson on Tuesday speak about the change of preaching when Harry first came to St. John's in 1978.

Because in every sermon, Harry had people follow along the Bible. He put Bibles in the pews for the first time. And he taught the congregation that the Bible is the unchanging reference point for belief that Jesus Christ is Lord.

[11 : 12] And God brought faith and great change to the congregation because more and more people began to call upon the name of the Lord. Why? It is because they had faith, because they heard, and a preacher brought faithfully the word of Christ to them.

And that brings us to the last question. How are they to preach unless they are sent? And what Paul is getting here has to do with the quality of the preacher.

Because there are many preachers inside and outside the church that we actually listen to every day. We listen to it in the media. We listen to it within churches as well.

And we must ask the question, who are the preachers that God sends? Well, we get a clue in Jeremiah 14. You don't need to turn there.

But in there, Jeremiah says, The Lord said to me, the prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them.

[12 : 19] Now, what that tells us is that the people that God sends to preach are those who are telling the truth in Jesus' name.

They are faithful to God's word, as Harry was. They are not necessarily eloquent or charismatic or a brilliant public speaker, but they will always speak the truth of Jesus.

Those are the preachers that God sends. Paul, saying about himself as a preacher in 1 Corinthians 2, said, I didn't come to your church proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom, for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Here's my qualifications as a preacher. I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom. Okay, well, that just about negated every single value we have in preaching and public speaking in our culture.

But here's what happened. It was in the demonstration of the spirit and of power that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

[13 : 34] You see, a faithful preacher is a gift from God because God powerfully gives the gift of faith as they faithfully preach the word of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is the one who changes hearts, who brings us out of the kingdom of darkness and sin into his kingdom of light and life, the kingdom of joyful obedience to him.

A faithful preacher is used by God for his great purposes in the world. And so I want you to see the process. It's very clear here.

In order to call upon Jesus, a person needs faith. To have faith, they need to hear Jesus. To hear Jesus, they need a preacher. And to have a true preacher, God needs to send them. God sends someone faithful to Jesus and his word.

And this works out in every very different testimony that a person might have about how they came to first call upon the Lord Jesus. And so I want at this time to ask somebody in this congregation to stand and to give their testimony.

[14 : 41] Keith, you have a microphone. Why don't you stand up right now? And I'd like to ask you how and when you first called upon the name of the Lord Jesus. The September 10th, 1995 was the day that I called upon the name of the Lord Jesus.

Because it was only the second time that I can remember that I'd ever been to church. And we'd gone to a church, a Baptist church, in a little town in northwestern Pennsylvania, not far from Lake Erie.

A friend of my father's had invited our family to come to this church that he loved. And we'd gone once. And I wasn't really interested in going back.

We went back again as a family. And I was a high school student. And the preacher began to talk about the Gospel of Mark.

He was going to do a sermon series on the Gospel of Mark. And so his first sermon in the Gospel of Mark was one verse. The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

[15 : 55] That's all he talked about was those words. Because he said, I want to talk about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That he was about to preach all the way through.

But he wanted to give an overview of it. And so I remember sitting there. And he talked about how this would be the Gospel about Jesus Christ. But how this was also the Gospel that came from Jesus Christ.

And he started talking about that. And I'd never heard any of it. And as he preached it, I sat and I just believed it.

I mean, everything that he was saying, my heart just affirmed. It just knew that it was right. I don't know how I knew it. I just knew that. Of course, God was working in my heart.

I'd never heard this before. So he talked about the Gospel. That Jesus Christ is Lord. But that he's also the Lord of all. And my Lord. But he's the Lord who loves me. So he died for sin.

[16 : 58] For my sin. So that if I repent of my sin and I trust in Jesus Christ, he's my Lord forever. And I knew in that moment that God loved me.

And that I would repent of my sin. And so the preacher extended a... It's a Baptist church. So the preacher extended an invitation to trust in Christ.

And he said, if you are trusting in Christ, if you are calling on Christ in your heart, come and tell me after the service. I did. And I went forward and I sat with him.

And we sat and we prayed. And he put his arm on my back. And I called out to the Lord. And he said afterwards, he said, I've never quite felt someone's heart pounding through the back like that.

Like it was... That was, for me, the day. September 10th, 1995. And I have a tape of that sermon. And every year on September 10th, I listen to that sermon again. And it was the first day of the rest of my life.

[18 : 03] So that was how. Thank you very much, Keith. Now, you heard what happened there. Keith called on the name of the Lord on that day on September 10th. And he called because he believed in Jesus.

You heard how he talked about who Jesus was. He knew it very clearly. He remembers well. I was impressed. But then I realized he's listening to it every year. And he believed because he heard very clearly from Mark who Jesus was.

And that Jesus spoke to him through that. And wonderfully, he heard because he had a very faithful preacher. A preacher who actually preached out of God's word with a faithfulness to Jesus.

A belief that Jesus speaks directly through the power of his Holy Spirit. And in this congregation, there are hundreds of different testimonies of how people came to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus and be saved.

But always, in that process, God sends a faithful preacher. And I know that some of you will say, well, that was the Bible that I first believed. And I know that that happens.

[19 : 14] And that was the original faithful preacher who wrote that book of the Bible, who is speaking to you. And sometimes it is through people that are friends who share with you the good news of who Jesus Christ.

They are that first, the extension of a faithful preacher. And they are all precious gifts from God. And that's why verse 15 says, how beautiful.

And that word can be translated as timely. How timely and fine are the feet of those who bring good news. In other words, what a precious gift it is when a preacher faithfully brings the good news.

And it is powerful and far-reaching, the work that a preacher does. Because it actually draws all of us into the work of God.

Because preachers who are true to God's word equip you to be part of God's work of mission in the world, part of his purpose. He calls you to be an extension of that work of preaching.

[20 : 20] And I saw that in my own life. My story is very different as far as how I came to Christ. I always knew that Jesus was my Lord as far as I go back in my life.

As far as I can remember. And I called on him. It was the most natural thing to do because I knew that God made me and that he was my heavenly father because Jesus loved me and died for my sins.

I had heard the voice of Jesus. That's why I called on him. And I had this faith. Why? Because my parents told me who Jesus was.

We prayed to him together. They read something from the Bible every day from the beginning of my life. And we would also talk in the course of the day about what it meant to follow Jesus as those opportunities arose.

Just in the course of life. And all of that was confirmed by my Sunday school teachers. So I heard Jesus through my parents, through my Sunday school teachers. They were my first faithful preachers.

[21 : 24] And they were able to do that because they themselves were equipped by faithful preachers in their life. And it is because they told the truth about Jesus that I know God sent them to me so that I could call on him.

And that is a precious gift to me. You know, I see them as having beautiful, timely feet as they came. So you can see how the preaching of word equips parents and Sunday school teachers to be about his purpose, to bring faith to people.

And so it's right for you and I to have a longing that is like Paul's. I want you to look at the very top of chapter 10. Here's Paul's desire.

And God calls us to have that desire in our own heart.

To have this desire for those who in our life do not yet believe in the Lord Jesus, who haven't called on his name. And this is a prayer that God needs to give us answer by his power because it is very easy to be discouraged.

[22 : 43] Look at verse 16. Paul experienced this discouragement. That's what's happening in chapters 9 through 11. He says, but they have not all obeyed the gospel.

They have not all obeyed the gospel. And it wasn't because they had not heard Paul. They had not heard the gospel. Paul says in verse 18, in fact, that they have understood their history of knowing God's grace and not responding well.

Verse 16, you know, having said they don't believe in the gospel. He actually gives Old Testament readings here that say there's really no excuse. They heard. It was as though they went partway down the line of that process.

They had a faithful preacher. They heard who Jesus was. But they at that point of faith, it broke down for them. And that's discouraging.

Paul would travel, first of all, in every city. The first thing he would do when he arrived at a city would be to go to the synagogue and preach Jesus. And usually he would experience rejection by the majority.

[23 : 52] And it was the ungodly Gentiles who found God and who God showed himself to as Paul preached. Yet Paul would continue to do this over and over again.

Why? Well, we're going to close with verse 21. He was following God's example. And it's our example, too. Here's God's example.

Of Israel, he says, all day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people. This is what Paul followed.

And this is what we're called to follow as well. To persevere, to be patient in being those who bring the gospel to those who are around us. And I want to close by saying that if you have not called out to Jesus Christ, he is holding out his hands to you now.

And we're not a Baptist congregation, but we will say anyway that God today invites you to call on the name of the Lord Jesus and be saved.

[25 : 00] This is what he's doing through this reading. This is what God is speaking to you personally about. And if you have called on God, if you have called on the name of the Lord Jesus, persevere as Paul did.

There are many people in your lives who will reject the gospel. But God calls you and equips you by preachers to persevere, to continue to hold out your hands with the gospel.

Just as a preacher is sent to a congregation or evangelist to a certain place, God sends you to people in your life with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You may be the only one whose feet bring good news to them. And even though many may reject, there will be some people in your life who you're bringing to the gospel will be seen as beautiful and timely.

And in God's eyes, that bringing of the gospel is always beautiful and is always timely. Think of your own experience about how God brought the voice of Jesus into your own life.

[26 : 08] And think what a treasure that is for those who will hear and receive it. Let's pray. Let's bow our heads and pray together. Father, we thank you because you speak to us personally and powerfully that we hear the voice of Jesus in your word.

We thank you for faithful preachers in our lives. We thank you because of the gift of hearing Jesus speak through them. We thank you for the gift of faith that you give as we not only know about Jesus, but we know Jesus through your word.

And we pray that you would help us to be about your great purpose in this world, that every person should call upon the name of the Lord and be saved.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Let us continue in prayer. Amen. Amen.

Thank you.