

Rescue the Perishing

How to Get to Heaven from Earth – Part VI

Romans 10:14-15a

Introduction

I invite your attention to Romans, chapter 10. Verses 14 and 15 deliver one of the most compelling passages of scripture in all of the Bible. Paul writes,

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? . . .

While I normally begin with some story or illustration to point to the need for the text, today I want to begin by giving my outline. I should say that I will give several approaches to this great text. I know that sounds exciting . . . please, no applause!

This text revolves around four questions and one commendation. All four of the questions and the final commendation begin with the word, “how”. That is not my outline, I just wanted to point that out.

Outlines of Romans 10:14-15a

1. One approach for students of the Word is:
 - The first two questions reveal the unbeliever’s response.
 - The second two questions challenge the believer’s responsibility.
2. The questions could also be outlined in this way:
 - The first question relates to an unbeliever acting in faith.

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed?

- The second question relates to an unbeliever hearing the facts.

How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?

- The third question relates to the believer speaking.

And how will they hear without a preacher?

- The fourth question relates to the believers sending.

How will they preach unless they are sent?

3. Another arrangement of these four questions could be along these lines:
 - The first two questions have to do with the message (hearing and believing).
 - The second two questions have to do with the method (preaching and sending).
4. This text could be approached in this fashion as well:
 - The first question has to do with the miracle of the gospel – calling upon Christ.
 - The second question has to do with the message of the gospel – hearing about Christ.

- The third question has to do with the messenger of the gospel – the preacher preaching Christ.
 - The fourth question has to do with the ministry of the gospel – the church sending in the name of Christ.
5. These verses could be dissected by studying the verbs:
 - Calling;
 - Hearing;
 - Preaching;
 - Sending.
 6. The text could be turned around and outlined in this way:
 - The believer sends the messenger;
 - The messenger delivers the message;
 - The unbeliever understands the meaning;
 - The unbeliever accepts the Messiah.
 7. The questions could be looked at from Paul’s perspective:
 - In the first two questions you can almost feel Paul pitying the world.
 - In the last two questions you can almost feel Paul prodding the church.
 8. One final approach could be:
 - This is compassion for the world:
*How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed?
 How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?*
 - This is the crisis of the church:
And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent?

So there they are – eight outlines. That is all of the c’s and p’s and f’s and s’s and m’s and g’s and r’s that I could think of. Was seminary worth it, or what?!

This text is easy to outline – anyone could do it. This text is difficult to live out – that is why so few do.

We could go home after a few more comments on:

- the plight of the world;
- the priority of the church.

There is another outline!

We could sing a closing hymn about rescuing the perishing and caring for the dying and then, we could all go to lunch and forget all about the dying.

It is easier to stay in Romans, chapter 9, and discuss the sovereignty of God in the matter of salvation. We have previously discussed that and learned that salvation is initiated by God according to His eternally sovereign act of election. We left chapter 9 and were a little overwhelmed with the fact that salvation is completely up to God.

However, halfway through chapter 10, that arrests the scholars and the linguists and the Calvinists in one fell swoop, we are a little overwhelmed with the fact that salvation is completely up to us.

In chapter 9, salvation is predestined by the intentional foreknowledge of God acting upon the counsel of His electing decree.

In chapter 10, we are told to go tell the world the gospel because if we do not, they cannot call upon Christ for salvation.

How do you resolve a paradox like this? You do not . . . because you cannot! Both the will of man and the will of God in redemption are taught in scripture.

Charles Spurgeon once said, “To deny election and free will is to lose your soul . . . to try and understand is to lose your mind.”

One covenant theologian, whom I enjoy reading from time to time, even though he is so wrong on several things, admitted that it was clear from the thrust of Paul’s message that the church is responsible to take the gospel to the whole world; not just because it is responsible, but because without it, whoever will believe will not be able to believe for they will not know what to believe and in Whom they must believe.

That is well said.

In chapter 9, we read the startling truth that we depend entirely upon God for our salvation.

In chapter 10, we read the startling truth that God depends upon us to offer the message of salvation.

This is what Paul talks about when he says, in I Corinthians, chapter 3, verse 9, that,

. . . *we are God’s fellow workers* . . .

Salvation is the work of God? Yes! However, sovereign God has chosen to use people!

Like Jesus Christ, we can say today, “I must be about My Father’s business!”

So what is His business? Paul will remind us that it has something to do with beautiful feet!

I want to go back to the first outline that I gave – primarily because it is the one that many of you tried to write down, and then gave up!

Now, we have already spent many Sundays discussing the doctrinal points of these verses; such as, calling, faith, belief, the gospel, and the implied truths of eternal life in heaven or hell. Today I want to speak in general terms about the passion of Paul and the mission of the church.

The Unbeliever's Response

The first two questions in Romans, chapter 10, verses 14 through 15a, reveal the unbeliever's response. Their response, we will notice, is two-fold:

- First, they understand the facts;
- Secondly, they call out in faith.

Notice verse 14 again.

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? . . .

In other words, "If they never hear about Christ, they will never be able to call upon Christ for salvation!"

You might say, "Surely in America, people know the facts."

Oh? According to data from the Barna Research group, from a poll conducted a year and a half ago, this is not supported. People were asked the following:

- Do you believe that praying to deceased saints can positively effect your life? Half of the people said, "Yes."
- Do you believe the Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths? Four out of six said, "Yes."
- Do you believe truth can only be discovered through human reasoning and personal experience? Fifty-four percent said, "Yes."
- Do you believe that Jesus Christ sinned like other people when He was on earth? Forty-two percent said, "Yes."
- Do you believe that when people are born, they are neither good nor evil; they make a choice between the two as they mature? Seventy-four percent said, "Yes."

In other words:

- Forget about original sin that has corrupted human nature, causing all mankind to be sinners.
- Forget about truth being propositional, regardless of experience or perspective.
- Forget about Jesus Christ being a sinless substitute for mankind.
- Forget about the Koran, the Book of Mormon, and the Bible being authoritative or unique – they are all saying the same thing, even though reading them reveals that they are saying very different things about a lot of things, including how to go to heaven.

Listen, your best bet is to pray to some deceased person in hopes that somehow that will help your life now, and maybe your eternal life to come.

The average American no longer knows the facts of:

- Sinful humanity;
- A sinless Savior;
- The unique inspiration of the scriptures;
- The absolute nature of eternal truth.

It is not a wonder that one secular pollster found this kind of religious confusion, without really knowing the implications of it:

- 90% of adult Americans believe in God,
- 82% believe in heaven, and
- 75% believe in hell.
- But 25% of the same adults also said they believe in reincarnation (so, if 90% said they believe in God, but 25% of the same people said they believe in reincarnation, which God are they talking about believing in – Yahweh or Krishna?)
- Furthermore, 50% of the same adults also said they believe in ghosts – meaning there are departed spirits who did not go to heaven or hell, but are just wandering around the planet.¹

You might say, "Don't be so concerned with America, we need to get the gospel to the mission field."

Ladies and gentlemen, America is the mission field. Where you work; where you go to school; where you live; where you play – that is the mission field.

So when Paul says the unbeliever needs to understand the basic facts of the gospel in order to exercise faith in God, he happens to be talking about your world! So,

How are they going to believe in faith when they've never heard the facts?

By the way, Paul is not making an appeal to foreign missions or to local missions – that would be too easy for us to excuse ourselves from. No, Paul is making an appeal for believers to join in the mission – period!

Paul then goes deeper with his penetrating questions – until we realize that he is pointing his finger at us!

The Believer's Responsibility

The first two questions in Romans, chapter 10, verses 14 through 15a, reveal the unbeliever's response; the second two questions reveal the believer's responsibility. Verse 14 ends with Paul asking this pointed question,

. . . And how will they hear without a preacher?

In other words, "Who among you will commit yourselves to delivering the facts?"

The message is not yours; it does not have to be clever – you simply have a calling from God to preach.

This calling from God was described by Spurgeon as, "the intense, all-absorbing desire for the work."

The apostle Paul revealed it when he wrote, in I Corinthians, chapter 9, verse 16,

. . . I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

Where are the preachers who will stand and speak for God?

Are there any here among us who feel their heart yearning at the thought of it? Do you sense it; do you dare to think it – that God is calling you into the ministry?

This Greek word for "preaching," or "kerusso," is a word that can refer to more than preaching as an occupation. It can also mean, "to proclaim or to herald a message".

This would include men and women in all types of venues where the truth of the gospel is delivered to all ages and all races. They could be communicating God's Word in a myriad of ways: spoken; printed;

broadcast; televised; signed; interpreted; web cast; projected; dramatized; sung – somehow communicated!

Paul is looking the believer in the eye and saying, "Nobody will ever be saved by just watching you – no matter how nice you are; no matter how giving you are; no matter how godly you are."

Your lifestyle may demonstrate your faith, but it cannot deliver the facts of your faith – eventually you must communicate the gospel. You do not have to be a preacher in a pulpit to join Paul in his passion.

I think of Edward Kimball as this kind of passionate person. He was a shoe maker and a Sunday school teacher in Chicago, during the early 1800's. His passion was to preach the gospel to young boys from Chicago's inner city. Through him, a young man named D. L. Moody accepted Christ and grew up to become a world-renowned preacher. In 1879, Moody won a young man to the Lord by the name of F. B. Meyer. I have nearly everything F. B. Meyer wrote. He also became a famous preacher, used by God to reach thousands with his sermons and the books he authored. Meyer won a young man to Christ by the name of J. W. Chapman. Chapman, in turn, grew up to become a preacher and one day, his preaching brought to Christ a baseball player named Billy Sunday. Billy Sunday would rivet the attention of America as he preached under canvass tents – eventually to more than a million people. In one campaign he came to Charlotte, North Carolina, and held meetings that were so impacting that they extended the meetings and Billy Sunday called his friend Mordecai Ham to come and preach. It was while Ham was preaching that a teenage boy named Billy Graham gave his heart to Christ.ⁱⁱ

Six men trace their gospel lineage to a man who was not a minister by trade. He was a shoemaker – he sold shoes! That is what he did for a living, but he lived for the sake of the gospel.

The final question is in verse 15a of Romans, chapter 10.

How will they preach unless they are sent? . . .

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Paul finally points his finger at the church.

We deserve to be pointed at, don't we? The church has forgotten that its mission is not bound up in how many it can seat, but in how many it can, what? Send!

Most of the sending by the church today, is the sending of membership letters by transfer. In our country today, eighty percent of church growth is by

transfer; that is, by one person leaving one church and going to another. So the church is not really growing in numbers, it is simply shifting from one location to another.

By the way, that is what I did! That is what my wife did. We were not saved through this ministry – were you?!

In America, one church every day closes its doors and goes out of business. Is it because there is no business left? More than likely, a long time ago, they forgot what business they were in.

The crisis of the church remains.

In the last twenty years in London alone, four hundred churches were converted into mosques. Nearly every other week, a church is turned into a mosque.ⁱⁱⁱ

One of the daughter churches that our church has planted is renting a former church building. It is a lovely brick church building with wooden floors and a baptistery that still holds water. Only now, the former Baptist church is owned by a Muslim, who rents it to those who can pay. Who knows, maybe one day he will get serious about his religion and turn that church building into a mosque.

Paul wants to leave us with a deeper pity for the world and a deeper passion for the work. How can they believe in Him whom they've never heard about? And how will they hear about Him if someone doesn't deliver the news? And how can they go if the church won't send and subsidize and support and pray?

Is the church training? Is it reaching? Does it care?

Conclusion

While preparing for this message, I received a wonderful e-mail from David Williams, our pastor of outreach ministries. He is involved in training more than sixty adults in our church in how to share the gospel.

His e-mail read, "Here's an update for you from this past Wednesday night . . . we had 38 visits in which our teams presented the gospel 13 different times to 18 people from varying religious backgrounds, including several Hindus. Praise the Lord for five people who accepted God's free gift of salvation!"

That is an illustration of Romans 10:14-15.

Last year, Ben Patterson told the story of the Jesus Film being shown to a tribe in the jungles of

East Asia – a tribe that had never heard the name, Jesus Christ, before. This is another illustration of Romans, chapter 10. Let me read from the article.

Not only had these people never heard of Jesus Christ, they had never seen a motion picture before. Then, all at once, on one unforgettable evening, they saw it all – the gospel in their own language, visible and real. They watched and listened as Jesus preached the gospel – told the crowds who He was and why He had come. You can only imagine how it felt for this tribe to see the movie portrayal of Christ, healing the sick, loving the children, yet was held without a trial and beaten by jeering soldiers.

As they watched this, this tribe of people came unglued. They stood up and began to shout at the cruel men on the screen, demanding that this outrage stop. When nothing happened, they ran to attack the missionary, assuming he was responsible. The missionary quickly turned off the projector (I'll bet!) and explained that the story wasn't over yet; there was more. So they settled back onto the ground, not quite sure, holding their emotions in tenuous check.

Then came the crucifixion. Again, the people could not hold back. They began to weep and wail with such loud grief that once again the film had to be stopped. The missionary again tried to calm them, answering questions and explaining the story wasn't over. There was more. Once again they composed themselves and sat down to see what happened next.

Next came the resurrection. The stone was rolled away . . . Jesus was alive. Pandemonium broke out this time, but for a different reason. The gathering had spontaneously erupted into a celebration. The noise now was of jubilation, and it was deafening. The people were jumping and dancing and hugging and weeping. Christ was risen indeed.

Again, the missionary shut off the projector. But this time he did not tell them to calm down and wait for what was next. All that was supposed to happen next, was happening.

They heard the gospel and believed.^{iv}

People:

- Wrote the script;
- Produced the movie;
- Played the instruments;
- Acted the parts;
- Made the costumes;
- Bought the movie projector;
- Supplied the generator;
- Trained the missionaries;
- Flew the team to the field;
- Supported the team from home;
- Gave the money for it all;
- Plus a million more things that occurred.

And these unbelievers heard and even saw the
gospel,
and they understood the facts,
and God provided the faith,
and the two intersected
in human minds and hearts
in this miracle of regeneration,
and they believed on this
risen Savior
and were saved.

Oh God, increase our pity for the world; increase
our passion for Your work! Help us to never be
satisfied with silence, but to speak wherever You
have placed us, so that our world will hear and, we
pray, come to believe in You, our resurrected Lord
and Savior. Amen.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 9/26/2004 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Barna Research and NBC 17 News, (Nov. 8, 2002 and March 5, 2003).

ⁱⁱ Bill Wilson, Streets of Pain (Word Publishers, 1992), p. 123.

ⁱⁱⁱ Charisma, Leadership 2004, "To Verify", 11/93, <http://www.PreachingToday.com>.

^{iv} Ben Patterson, "Resurrection and Pandemonium," Leadership Magazine (April 13, 2003).