

This Little Light of Mine

How to Get to Heaven from Earth – Part VII

Romans 10:15b-17

Introduction

Let us go back to our place in Romans, chapter 10, and let Paul's passion for his world and his prodding of the church re-enter our ears and find its way down into our souls. Look at verses 14 through 17.

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? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!"

However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?"

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

In a recently published book on the subject of the church impacting our culture, Dr. James White made some interesting analogies.

In the late 1800's, no business matched the financial and political dominance of the railroad. Trains dominated the transportation industry of the United States, moving both people and goods throughout the country. Then a new discovery came along – the automobile – and incredibly, the leaders of the railroad industry did not take advantage of their unique position to literally buy up this new development. The automotive revolution

was happening all around them, and they missed it. Why? They thought they were in the train business. But, they were in fact, in the transportation business. They forgot what their main objective was supposed to be . . . they lost sight of the goal.

Ron Pobuda of National Audio Video made a similar, but more contemporary example of the same thing when he said, "If Sports Illustrated magazine understood it was in the sports information business, not the publishing business, we would be watching the Sports Illustrated Channel instead of ESPN."

And what is the business of the church?

I read of another gentleman who recorded the results of a survey in which his organization interviewed members of nearly one thousand churches in America. These church members were all asked the same, singular question, "What is the mission of your church?"

The results were disheartening, but revealing. Ninety percent of the church members said a number of different things that were easily categorized under this heading, "The church exists to take care of my family's and my needs." In other words, nine out of ten church members said the church existed for them. Only one out of ten said the church existed to do something in some way related to winning the world to Christ.

Let me give one more analogy from James White's new book that draws on data similar to that which I have just read. He wrote,

If the goal of the church was to make automobiles, the average church member

would be satisfied with nothing more than a maintenance program for existing cars in which windshields were washed, fluids were checked, and tire pressure was monitored. [Simply put] the goal of making cars has been replaced with maintaining cars and polishing them for the showroom floor.ⁱ

What did Jesus Christ say our mission was? He said to His disciples, in Matthew, chapter 28, verses 18b through 19a,

. . . All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . .

Go! Go across the street and share the gospel with an American native. Go across the hallway; go across the living room; go across the internet and share the gospel. After last Sunday's service, a young professional came up to me and said that he was leading an internet discussion group with his old fraternity. He was passionate about sharing his faith with them.

Ladies and gentlemen, has it ever occurred to you that there is not one verse in the New Testament that tells an unbeliever to go to church? The unbeliever has never been commanded to go to church – the church has been commanded to go to the unbeliever.

With great passion, Paul prods the church in Rome to embrace this verb, "Go". In fact, he said that if they did not speak the facts of the gospel, the unbeliever would not be able to exercise faith in God. Paul writes, in verses 14 through 15a,

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? . . .

In this text, we discover:

- The response of the unbeliever – believing and calling;
- The responsibility of the believer – speaking and sending.

Commendation from God – Believer's Beautiful Feet

Paul goes further to deliver what is nothing less than a reward for the believer. Look at verse 15b.

. . . Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!"

The Greek word for gospel, "euangelion," is often translated, "good news or glad tidings". Sharing the good news is called "euangelizomai," which, transliterated, gives us our English word, "euangelism" or "evangelism". Evangelism is simply one person telling another person the good news!

Paul is writing, "How beautiful are the feet of those who evangelize their world."

He is quoting from Isaiah. The context of this in Isaiah, relates to the messengers who delivered the news to Israel that their days of bondage in Babylon were over – their captivity to the kingdom of darkness was over!

Paul applies that to the message of the church – the gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, "Hey world, you no longer have to be captive to the kingdom of darkness – you can be liberated, set free by the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Is it any wonder that this word was used at the birth of Christ. The angel delivered the news, as recorded in Luke, chapter 2, verses 10b through 11,

. . . for behold, I bring you good news [euangelizomai] of great joy . . . for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

In my Bible, I have circled the word "you," in verse 11, and written my name in the margin, so that the verse reads,

for today in the city of David there has been born for you, Stephen, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

At the very first moment of the incarnation, the message was glad tidings.

Is it any wonder that at the birth of not only the Savior, but the church and the new dispensation of grace, Peter would preach the very first sermon and say, (paraphrase Acts 13:32-33),

And we declare unto you glad tidings, . . .

(the same Greek word),

. . . how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, and God fulfilled the promise by raising Jesus from the dead . . .

Now Paul, in verse 15, uses the same word to describe the activity of every believer. Not only the appointed evangelist, pastor, or church leader, but every believer who accepts the responsibility, "brings glad tidings of good things."

The mission of the church is to deliver the good news to a world in bondage!

It is up to God to bring about spiritual life – we are just the messenger boys; we are the postal service; we just deliver the message.

I will never forget delivering that good news to a woman who had been raised in religious activity – church every weekend; good deeds throughout the week – hoping that she would somehow get into heaven. When I shared the gospel with her – that Jesus Christ is the only One good enough to deserve heaven, but that He paid the price for everyone’s ticket in, if they would only ask Him for it – she began to cry. This woman, in her late thirty’s, wept with her face in her hands. I would discover in a few minutes, they were tears of joy, as she repeated over and over again, “I can’t believe it’s free . . . I can’t believe it’s free!” And she prayed to accept the gift of salvation.

Brad Harbaugh, our singles pastor, sent an e-mail to me a few weeks ago, saying, “A single lady in her early forty’s, came into the office yesterday and asked to see the singles pastor. She wanted a tour of the building and some information about the church. [Brad shared with our staff later that it was near the end of the day and he was anxious to leave, but he stayed and accepted this impromptu appointment.] After the tour, I noted that she was looking for more . . . after asking her a few questions about her relationship with Christ, I discovered she didn’t know the gospel, and I presented the gospel to her. She eagerly accepted Christ as her Savior. Sometime later, she said she had been to five other churches for tours and no one had asked her about her spiritual condition. She is now attending Sunday school.”

You might be saying, “But I don’t have all the answers . . . I’m not a professional!”

Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, was asked, “When do you begin to tell others about Christ?”

Taylor typically responded with a question, “Tell me, when does a candle begin to shine? As soon as it is lit.”

A few days ago I prayed with a young man who finally heard the gospel. He had come to our visitor’s reception after a service with some questions. I was later in his home where he and his wife lived. She was a believer, passionately praying for his salvation. After he prayed to receive Christ I gave him the same assignment I usually give to everyone I pray with – “Before I see you again, tell three people what you just did; tell three people you accepted God’s free gift of salvation.”

Why? Because:

- it confirms his decision in his own heart as he repeats it;
- it roots his faith in verbal testimony;
- it provides encouragement as believers hear of his conversion and welcome him into the family;
- it challenges his resolve to study the word as some who hear will question what he did and why he did it;
- it produces accountability – he will tell someone at work that he became a Christian and discover his life is immediately under inspection – and that kind of accountability is great.

The world knows how a Christian should live. Your opportunities for encouragement are diminished because those in your world who are Christians do not know you are one too, and you are not studying the word in order to have an answer for the hope that is within you because you never share your hope.

You never outgrow those things. And the more you do those things, the more you want to do.

I read this past week about Jeff, who was twelve years of age. He and his best friend were playing baseball and broke a window. They took off running. No one saw what happened except Jeff’s seven year old brother. They went over to him and offered him a piece of candy not to tell. He refused the candy.

They said, “We’ll give you our baseball bat.”

Jeff said, “Nope, I don’t want that.”

They said, “We’ll give you our batting gloves.”

He still said, “Nope.”

They added, “Look, we’ll give you our new baseball gloves.”

“Nope.”

They pleaded with him, “Well, what do you want?”

The little brother said, “I wanna tell.”

“I wanna tell!” Oh, the joy of tattling.

I had a brother like that.

Michael Green made the observation that the gospel spread in the first century simply because people shared the gospel like it was gossip. They just had to tell somebody!

Paul said, “Oh my, you messengers of deliverance have beautiful feet.”

Was it because they had beautiful physical features? No. Their message was so incredibly wonderful that the recipients of the message thought the messengers were wonderful too.

The man I prayed with a few days ago, gave me a bear hug when I got up to leave. It was as if we had known each other for years. There is a connection that will always produce gratitude in him for my feet.

Compassion of God – Believer’s Burdened Heart

The reward for the messenger is actually two-fold in this text. It is not only a positive blessing, but a painful burden. Notice verse 16 of Romans, chapter 10.

However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?”

The immediate context is the Israelite who refuses to believe the Messiah.

Paul has already poured out his pain and hurt over the lost condition of Israel. Look back at verse 1 of chapter 10.

Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.

Look at the first three verses of chapter 9 also.

I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh,

In chapter 10, Paul broadens the application of Isaiah’s lamenting chapter on the suffering Messiah, in Isaiah, chapter 53. This is the great chapter where the Messiah is revealed as a suffering Lamb, led to slaughter without opening His mouth.

Isaiah says, in verse 1a,

Who has believed this message?

Now Paul applies that same painful truth to the church. You deliver the gospel and know that everyone will not believe.

You might think, “Well, maybe we’re not doing a good enough job delivering the goods! Maybe our methods are not clever enough; our speech is not articulate enough!”

May I encourage you that this same verse from Isaiah is quoted after Jesus Christ Himself preached.

In John, chapter 12, Jesus preaches about His necessary death – that He must be lifted up – a reference to the cross. The text says, in verses 37 and 38,

. . . yet they were not believing in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: “Lord, who has believed our report? . . .”

Jesus wept over Jerusalem, yet Jerusalem would not believe.

The messenger; the church is to have beautiful feet and also a burdened heart.

I am convinced this is the problem. Every Christian, including myself, would like the commendation from God – the positive blessing of beautiful feet – but we struggle to pursue the compassion of God – the negative burden of a broken heart!

Give me beautiful feet . . . but not a broken heart.

If you have tried to share your faith with an unbelieving parent, or child, or friend, or co-worker, or neighbor, then you know the pain of their rejection; you know the sorrow of Isaiah.

Most people know of William Carey who pioneered modern missions by going to India. He was a poor, self-taught shoe maker. He was so poor that he was unable to adequately feed or clothe his children. After they set sail for India, his youngest child died; after arriving, his oldest child ran away. He did not see one decision for Christ, year after year. On top of that, it turned out that Carey’s physician and partner had traveled to India with him, not for the gospel, but to escape the authorities for his financial misdeeds. After ten years, the first convert to Christianity was recorded in Carey’s journal.

However, by the time he died, one hundred seventy-five years ago, Carey had translated the Bible into forty-four Indian dialects, started the first evangelical church in India, revolutionized the philosophy of missions by including women in the ministry of evangelism, trained national pastors, and laid the foundation for what is still going on today.

I have to tell you, I would love to have Carey’s beautiful feet, but I am not sure I could handle the burden of his broken heart.

Consideration of God – Believer’s Fragrant Aroma

To those who will enlist in the divine postal service of delivering the message in whatever ways

you can – notice that Paul does not give a list of methods. In fact, he closes his thoughts by giving a summary statement – we know from the Greek construction – a statement that does not list the methods that have priority, but simply the message that has the priority.

Notice verse 17. You could paraphrase the first word “So,” as “So then,” or “Consequently,” or even, “In Conclusion”.

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

This is the priority of the scriptures – the word of Christ.

Now there is some debate as to whether or not the word of Christ is objective genitive – meaning it is, “the word about Christ” – or subjective genitive – meaning it is, “the word from Christ” [as if Christ is the One speaking].ⁱⁱ

I personally think it is objective since the thrust of Paul’s passion is for messengers to deliver the gospel about Christ. However, it really does not matter in this case, simply because both make great theology.

When you speak for Christ, Christ speaks through you. In fact, when Jesus sent out His disciples to preach, He said to them, in Luke, chapter 10, verse 16a,

The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me . . .

The church today seems paralyzed at the thought of being unpopular – rejected, or worse than anything else, irrelevant. In the evangelical church today, being viewed as irrelevant is the unpardonable sin.

Ladies and gentlemen, the relevancy of the church is directly related to the mission of the church. We do not get our message from the world, we get our message from the word.

The world might say the church of Jesus Christ is irrelevant; unnecessary – as they do in China, Russia, and Palestine. What does the word say?

I recently read the interview of a pastor who graduated with me in the same graduating class at seminary. He now leads a church of more than 12,000 people. He was giving his preaching schedule in the interview, and said that ten weeks of the year, they devote their Sunday mornings to Bible exposition. That is, they cover some section of scripture or book of the Bible for ten weeks. The other forty-two weeks are devoted to felt needs – topical issues ranging from relationships to finances;

challenges ranging from stress reduction to anger management. He is relevant.

This fits so well with our cultural shift from objective truth to pragmatism – just as Erwin Lutzer was telling us in a session last summer. In other words, the primary question in our culture today is, “Does it work?” not, “Is it right . . . ethical . . . moral . . . true?” just, “Does it work?”

The church has lost its mission and in reality, made the primary subject of study the human condition. There are forty-two weeks of the human condition, with a spattering of proof texts to make it sound like Bible study, while the primacy of the word and the explanation of the word of God, which, according to Paul, in Romans, chapter 10, verse 17, is the foundation of genuine faith, is lost.

More and more today, we have ministries expounding on life and illustrating with scripture. What we need is to return to expounding the scripture and illustrating with life.

The church has lost so much respect from our culture because they see it groveling for position and maneuvering for respect. They know it because that is the game they play.

No wonder George Gallup Jr. remarked, “Never before in our generation has the church made so many inroads into society, while at the same time, making so little difference.”

Our gospel has lost its message – because the subject of our message is no longer Christ, but us! We are pawing off on a lost society, a Christianity that we promise will work – it is pragmatic. Jesus will work for you!

In other words, “Christianity has an inspired diet for you; Christianity will increase your finances; it will reduce your debt; it will resolve your relational issues; it will enhance your self-esteem; it will advance your career; it will even help you unlock the secrets of beauty and health. Christianity works!”

Tell that to the Christian girl who was arrested and put in jail overnight. She was beaten by soldiers who mocked her faith. Did Christianity enhance her physical beauty?

Tell that to the couple from our church who just left for Budapest to teach children – emptying their savings accounts in order to go. Did Christianity increase their finances?

Tell that to the student who receives a failing grade for writing a paper from a Christian world view. Did Christianity help his grade point average?

Tell that to a businessman who refused to lie and lost his job, or to the woman who refused the advances of her boss and had her career grind to a halt. Did their Christianity advance their careers?

Tell it to a young man who recently became a Christian and his father now makes fun of him. Did Christianity resolve his relational issues, or add to the strain?

When someone says to you, “Listen, you want me to believe in this Christianity of yours? Well, I have one question, ‘Does Christianity work?’”

Tell them, “No, it’ll probably make things worse.”

Here is a verse for the church in America today, *[They] experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, . . . wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. (Hebrews 11:36ff)*

Isn’t Christianity great?!

The author of Hebrews describes these believers from God’s perspective, and writes,

men of whom the world was not worthy . . .

He did not say, “men of whom the world considered relevant”. No, he said, “men of whom the world was not worthy”.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, in II Corinthians, chapter 2, verses 14 and 15,

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in His triumph in Christ, and

manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;

Imagine that – beautiful feet . . . fragrant aroma.

When the Roman army won a major victory, they would celebrate with a spectacular parade. Musicians, choirs, soldiers, officials, and the entire population would line the streets. As a part of the celebration, the Romans would burn fragrances on altars, filling the entire city with a pleasant aroma. Even those who could not see the sights, could hear the music and smell the fragrant aroma. That is Paul’s word picture, in these verses, of the believer.

We are triumphant in Christ. Everywhere we go, we carry the message of Christ’s victory; we carry about the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ.

Ladies and gentlemen, the most compelling evidence that Christ is alive and triumphant is the life of the believer. The fragrance of wholesome purity . . . kindness, truth, winsomeness, and honesty in all our dealings.ⁱⁱⁱ

Above all, the believer has a passion to deliver the news of Christ’s victory over sin and death – the message of peace at last, with a holy and righteous God.

Beautiful feet . . . fragrant believers.

These are messengers who the world considers irrelevant and God considers invaluable.

You are messengers of the word of Jesus Christ with your beautiful feet and your fragrant lives. You are what your world needs, more than anything else in the world today.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/3/2004 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ James Emery White, Rethinking the Church (Baker, 2003), p. 27.

ⁱⁱ James Montgomery Boice, Romans: Volume 3 (Baker, 1993), p. 1263.

ⁱⁱⁱ Henry T. Blackaby, Experiencing God Day-by-Day (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), p. 225.