

Romans 10

Our Epistle Reading Begins with a Quote, “The Word is Near you, in your mouth and in your heart.” But The lectionary cuts out the beginning of the verse! 8a, where Paul asks “what does it say?” And then, boom, here’s a quote – “The Word is near you...”

But that’s a pivotal, pivotal question! When the Romans have a question he invites them to consider what the Word of God says. May we be a people who, as we go through the ups and downs of life consider “What does the word of God say?”

Here in Romans 9-11 Paul is talking about God’s plan of salvation. “Well, what about it?” One might ask. “Well, what does the Word Say?” he might respond. What does God’s Word say in regards to God’s plan of salvation? He answers by quoting from Deuteronomy, 30: “The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.” The Word says that God’s Word has been given to you, it’s right next to you, in you! You’ve heard it, you’ve read it, you know it.

And so we spend all this time thinking, “can I be saved? Will I be saved? I am such a sinner, I am so insincere... What if I overthink it, what if I have doubts, what if I am not one of the elect?” Paul says, “Stop! What does it say?” The Word that is right next to you.

It says: as we read in Romans 10: this word of faith that the apostles proclaim, it says, “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.” And we want to compartmentalize everything – what does my heart have to do? What about my mouth? Which is first? Which is more important? Stop! And so to make the point clear he flips the body parts and verbs around and says, “For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” Which one is first the heart or the mouth? Or... maybe this saving faith encompasses both, even all, of you.

And we might say, “Ok believe with your heart and confess with your mouth and you will be saved, but Paul... that’s the problem, how do I know I believe or believe enough?!” And we look in at our emotions, our doubts, our sins, and we say “I don’t know if I feel it, I don’t know if I’ve done enough, I don’t know what I believe...” Stop! Does Paul tell you to look in? What does he say? He says Look at the Word. The Word near you. It’s right there, is it an accident it is there? What does it say?

And if you open it, you may find some law in there. “Don’t steal, don’t covet.” You’ll see how we fall short, how we can’t save ourselves. But you may also find in that Word made flesh – A Savior. Who came to save His people from their sins. Who came that all who believe would have eternal life. A friend of sinners. Who rejoices in mustard seeds and bruised reeds. Who forgives those who kill him, who gives a promise to a thief on the cross – a Word that is near to him – he rejoices in it. May we do the same. Rejoice in the Word for you. If he didn’t want you to hear it he could have arranged it, but there it is – a word of a Savior and Eternal life.

Yes that Word of God is Eyewitness testimony, given under pain of death. And why would they die for it? Because it was a lie they made up? No, but because it’s true. Not just true for them, but a truth they were willing to give their lives so you might know as well! According to God’s Word and Commission – they work so you might know this Word of truth. Why do that, why bring a word so *near* to you, if it wasn’t *for* you?

And so this word speaks of a Crucified and Risen Jesus. And so I might ask: “Do you think Jesus actually rose from the dead?” If so, then, as we already did, you just might stand with us and say that. There is a reason Christians have said those creeds forever.

And you might say, “well someone could just say the words and not mean it.” But remember what Paul said? This is mouth and heart. This is why Jesus can say, “Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, will be saved.” And Paul can say, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Which is it? Oh no your Bible is full of contradictions! Or, is one is the cry of faith, the other is lip service.

And so we doubt, “But Pastor, what if I’m just doing lip service!” Well are you? Are you lying through your teeth? Are you crossing your fingers when we say that creed? If so, you should probably stop. And If you aren’t sure and if you are all caught up in your head, well, I think Paul would direct you back out of your head and to the Word, and maybe, like the Ethiopian Eunuch, to someone who can help walk you through it and point you to the Cross and Empty Tomb and the evidence for them. “What does it say?”

Other questions come as we think of how God’s plan of salvation is brought to the world. We think “what of the Children? What of those with Disabilities, with Alzheimers, who can’t give a confession are they doomed now?” What does the Word say? What does it say of the little ones who believe in him? What does it say of the gift of baptism, promises from God that the cross is for them. That promise is for you too, very near to you indeed, that wet Word upon your head.

Does that contradict this passage that speaks of faith coming through the Holy Spirit and the Word? Or perhaps do we begin to see that God brings the cross to us in many ways, that we might find comfort that these promises really are for us?

The Cross that comes in Word, and that word might come from a friend, a parent, a pastor, a missionary, pages in a book. The Cross comes in Water, in Bread and Wine? Don’t believe me, Paul already talked about the Water in Romans 6, and he covers the bread and wine in 1 Cor 11.

And so we see this isn't just made up, but found in the Word. "What does it say" about God's promises and work to get you out of yourself and focused on His Work, His promises, His Cross that has come to you in these tangible ways? This word is near to you. That's not an accident. Nor is it a guilt trip, as in – shame on you you haven't been reading enough! No, perhaps it's simply a gift, and a comfort, and a simple truth: This Word of a Savior is for you.

And that is ultimately Paul's point in Romans 10, the Church was wondering who this word might be for, Jews, Gentiles? And that's probably not something we worry about too much – whether the Word is for the world or not, we know it's for all people of all time, but do you see the irony in that? We know the Word, the Savior, is for all, but we doubt whether it is for us.

And we protest, "but that's because Paul's talking about ethnicities, not me and my doubts and fears," but that's not true, he's talking about both. He's talking about ethnicities and also *the hardness of heart we sinners have* and especially Paul's own kindred who have rejected the Messiah and the Word so near to them. He speaks about our desire then to peek behind the curtain verses 6 and 7 to ascend or descend and see all these inner workings, but Paul's answer to this is the same – what does the Word say? This word that is yours and right there.

Is there any comfort in it? Any depiction of the heart of God for the world? Any promise to a doubting father who says "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief"? Any promise to a doubting disciple who demands to see the hands and side of the Lord? Any promise that the Good Shepherd holds his people in his hands and no one will snatch them out? Any promise, again about mustard seeds? Any promise for heinous sinners from David, to a thief, to Barabbas, to Paul himself who persecuted the Church!

What does it say? Is there hope for them? Yes! And so why do you think God wants you to hear it so badly, if the same hope isn't for you.

What does it say? This Word near you. Does it point to Jesus? Who overcomes the evil one with his accusations and temptations that we can't beat, so we needed someone who can. If we were saved by just "being better" on our own, why did Jesus have to go to a cross... and what does the word say: Does he go there? Yes! To die in our place, the ultimate sacrifice, to rise again overcoming death. Isn't that what it says? That a Savior died and rose for you? Yes!

May we rejoice in this word, and may it have its way in our lives that we might give a confession and rejoice in that confession, not as it earns us something, but because it is true, and right to speak of. God acts first, we respond. We see this beautifully in our Old Testament lesson – God is the first giver, we love because he first loved us. May he open our lips to speak the truths of his Word. And may we also and always take great comfort that the truths of His Word have come to us, that we might be saved and indeed we are.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.