

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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Romans 10:14-17

“The Greatest Story Not Being Told”

Intro. This morning I want to share a message with you about the importance of sharing the gospel & reaching the lost. A well-know evangelist, Wilbur Chapman, made the following observation. There were 40 individuals in the Gospels that were healed of the same disease. 34 were healed after being brought to Jesus by others. Only 6 seem to have come to Jesus on their own.¹ I believe that is the way it is when it comes to being saved and having our sins forgiven. Though some people seem to come to Jesus without the direct intervention of another person, most people come to Jesus through the witness and prayers of someone like a pastor, evangelist, S.S. teacher, a parent or a friend.

In v.14 of my text, Paul asks an important question, “How shall they believe?” In most countries outside the United States, less than 5% are Christians. There are billions in our world today who do not have saving faith. How shall they believe? I would estimate that no more than 25% of the population in this area are born again Christians. What about the other 75%? How shall they believe? We read the good news in Romans 10:13 that “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” Yet few are calling upon the Lord for salvation. In the average year a little less than one percent of the population of Colonial Heights is won to faith in Christ and is baptized in our Southern Baptist Churches (Ck.). That is just a small dent in the population. In our own church we have had a downward trend in baptisms the last year or two. We are not doing well at fulfilling one of the main purposes of our church.

So it is my purpose this morning to explore Paul’s answer the question, “How shall they believe?” In the providence of God, I am up to this particular message in my series in Romans right before our outreach revival. I hope to challenge us all to become more active in having a part in seeing more people come to trust Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. It is my prayer that we will see many saved next week.

Now the first thing I want you to think about is:

I. THE REASONS WHY MANY ARE NOT BEING SAVED

Before we can solve a problem, we need to understand the reasons for the problem. Why is it that few are being saved? Part of the blame rests with the individual. But part of the blame rests with the church, as we see shall. So why is it that so many are not being saved? Of course, the first reason is:

A. They Do Not Believe in Christ – Paul asks in v.14, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?” It is the simple truth that they must believe before they will call upon the Lord & be saved. They must believe what? First of all, they must believe in the existence of God and Jesus Christ. Heb. 11:6 says, “He who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” The vast majority of people do believe in God. Only a small percentage of people are atheists, who affirm there is no God. Well, the Bible calls them fools! (Psa. 14:1). After all, how can so great an effect as creation simply be a product of chance? You see clear evidence of design, beauty, & power in creation. Then there

¹ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: #7383* (Rockville, Maryland: Assurance Publishers, 1979).

are those who call themselves agnostics. They claim they just do not know if there is a God. I have the idea that most agnostics are liars. They know in their heart that there is a God; they just don't want to admit it! They don't want to be responsible to obey God. I believe that everyone here today believes in God. And you will not run into many atheists or agnostics as you attempt to share your faith.

Then a person must believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God & Savior of the world. Paul says in v.17, "So then faith comes by hearing,² and hearing by the word of God." Textual evidence suggests that Paul actually wrote that faith comes by hearing the word about Christ (objective genitive). Faith must have the proper object. It is not faith that saves you, but faith in Jesus that saves you. Well friends, to know Jesus is to trust Jesus, and to trust Jesus is to receive salvation of Jesus. If you want saving faith, listen and learn about Jesus, and faith will come.

So we see that no one is going to call upon the Lord for salvation unless they first believe in God, and believe in Jesus as their Savior. Salvation is really simple. Faith in Christ is all that is required. Unfortunately, quite a few in our country are not saved because they have been misled by false religion, or they simply refuse to believe. The latter type of unbeliever is referred to in v.16, "But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed our report?'" In this context Paul has been talking about Jewish unbelief. As we see here, Jewish unbelief was not unforeseen (cf. John 12:38). Modern unbelief does not surprise God either. In our country many are not saved, not because they have not heard, but because they have refused to believe. God has given witness to the fact that Jesus is our Savior from sin and He is the Son of God. And 1 Jn. 5:10 says that if you do not believe in Jesus, you are calling God a liar.

Are you not yet saved because you do not believe in Christ? You can believe in Christ today & be saved.

So one reason people are not saved is because they do not believe in Christ. Now let's consider another reason:

B. Often, They Have Not Believed Because They Have Not Truly Heard the Gospel – Paul goes on to ask in the middle of v.14, "And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" If people have not heard the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ, obviously they cannot believe it. And there are millions in our own country who have not heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

You may question that statement. But do you know that there are a significant number of children whose parents almost never take them to church? They may have heard about Jesus, but they have never heard the gospel presented to them. How shall they believe? They are certainly not going to hear the gospel in the public school. They took prayer & Bible reading out of the schools a long time ago. Few children & youth are going to hear the Gospel on TV when they have so many other programs to watch. And then there are many others who have had some exposure to Christianity and churches, but they have never had anyone sit down with them and explain God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. If you were to ask the average person how a person can go to heaven, they would not be able to give a biblical answer.

C. Many Have Not Heard, Because No One Has Told Them about Christ – Paul says in the last of v.14, "And how shall they hear without a preacher?" Whose fault is it that they have not heard? They will not hear the Gospel unless someone tells them. We should not expect sinful man to seek out someone to tell them about Jesus. That's just contrary to human nature. There is a recurrent thought pattern that is found in the church, and it goes something like this: "If people

² "Hearing" is the same word as "report" in the quotation from Isaiah 53:1 in the previous verse (Gk. *akoe*).

want to become Christians, they will come to church and find out how. Our church doors are open. Let them come, and hear, and be saved.” Often we do not openly say those words, but that seems to be the way we feel. But there is one main flaw with that supposition; it assumes that sinful man will seek out God. That is an unbiblical assumption. Rom. 3:11b teaches us that no one earnestly seeks out God on his own initiative. Instead, the natural man is like a sheep that is always going astray (Isa. 53:6). John 3:19-20 says, “...men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.” People have a natural tendency to stay away from church and from exposing themselves to the convicting truth of God’s Word. So if they have not heard, Paul puts most of the blame upon the church for not sending someone to tell them about Christ.

Here Paul mentions one specific means of Gospel proclamation, & that is preaching. You see, in that day, it was common for a herald to gather people in the public square to proclaim a message of some kind. In fact, that was one of the primary means of getting information out to the masses. They did not have a printing press. They did not have TV, radio, or the Internet. The early church used a form of mass communication that was already in existence. Today we use both TV & the internet to proclaim the Gospel because they have become two of the primary means of mass communication.

I want to make an important point. Paul implies here that there is no hope for any man who had not been reached by the Gospel. That is the imperative for evangelism and missions. Obviously this means that we must send and support missionaries who will take the gospel to people groups around the world who have never the gospel.

So the reason so many are not being saved is because in the chain of events that must take place, there is a break in the chain. Sometimes a person will hear, but not believe. They can’t be saved without faith in Christ. At other times, we Christians are the weak link in the chain. We are not doing enough to enable people to hear the Gospel. And that leads me from reasons for the problem to:

II. THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM

It is not my purpose to deal with the problem of unbelief. It is now my purpose to deal with the problem of the unheard Gospel. If the problem is the fact that many have not heard the good news of Jesus Christ, then what must we do to ensure that they have the opportunity to hear? One solution is given right in our text. Paul says in the last of v.14, “And how shall they hear without a preacher?” The gospel will not be revealed to men by angels. When God wanted to save the Gentile Cornelius, he sent an angel to him. But the angel did not present the Gospel to him. Instead, he instructed Cornelius to send for Peter. He was not saved until Peter proclaimed the Gospel to him. God has no other plan for sharing the gospel other than using people. I wonder if God is calling someone in my audience to preach? If so, it is time to answer that call, and we will send you out with our prayers.

Though Paul specifically mentioned preachers, we also need lay witnesses & Bible teachers. Public preaching is by no means the only way people were saved in the New Testament. In Acts 8 vv.1 & 4 it says that the church was scattered abroad from Jerusalem sharing the good news. That did not include the apostles. They stayed in Jerusalem. One of the closing verses of the Bible says, “Let him that hears say, ‘Come’.” Every man who knows the gospel is to make it known. The New Testament distinction between the preachers and the lay people was not what it is today. The distinction was not between those who preach and witness and those who do not preach and witness, but between those who lead the church and those who

follow their leadership. I believe that most people are won to Christ through the agency of lay people, such as Sunday School & VBS teachers, parents, friends, & associates. At least I'm convinced that's the way it was in the New Testament. The great preacher Charles Hadden Spurgeon was won to faith in Christ through the humble preaching of a layman, who did not know much more than to preach from Isaiah the words, "Look unto Me and live, all the ends of the earth." The great preacher D.L. Moody was won to Christ by a layman. Moody always preached as a layman.

The main point I want to make is that people will not be saved unless someone tells them the good news of Jesus Christ. If you and I do not go, then people who could be saved will remain lost in sin. Are you concerned about the lost condition of those who do not know Christ? Are you willing to be a witness for Jesus Christ? Well let me show you the kind of preachers & witnesses we need:

A. We Need God Sent Witnesses – Again, Paul says in v.15, "And how shall they preach unless they are sent?" This ties in with the concept of the herald, or preacher. No herald was to make a proclamation on his own, or give his own message. Instead, he was to be sent out with a message from someone in authority. Furthermore, that word "sent" is the verb form of the word "apostle." God wants to send His people out with a special commission to tell others about Jesus. In John 20:21 Jesus told His disciples, "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." If anyone asks you what right you have to share the gospel, tell them that *God* sent you! We must have an understanding that God is sending us out. Do you? Furthermore, most people will not come to us. We must go to them.

This is the pattern of the New Testament. Peter was sent to Cornelius. Philip was sent to the Ethiopian Eunuch. Jesus said in His great commission, "Go, therefore, & make disciples of all nations..." (Mt. 28:19). The New Testament pattern of evangelism and missions was one of sending people out, and not so much a matter of, "You come and hear us." Few are being saved because few are going out and doing the work that God has called us to do.

A man who goes to tell others about Christ must feel that he is sent to do it, or he will never do it properly and effectively. That is the motivation we need. There are two ways God will send you out. First, by His outward biblical command. Again, Jesus said in His great commission, "Go, therefore, & make disciples of all nations..." (Mt. 28:19). Secondly, God sends us out by an inward compulsion. You should feel with Paul, "Woe is me if I preach not the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:6). The prophet Jeremiah became so discouraged by the lack of response that he wanted to stop preaching. But he could not, for he said the word of God was like a burning fire shut up in his bones (Jer. 20:9). He couldn't stop preaching.

If right now you feel a burden for the lost, and you feel that you must do something about their lost condition, then God is sending you out. Will you answer the call?

One other way you can apply this truth is by praying that God will send out preachers, missionaries, & lay witnesses. Jesus said in Mt. 9:37-38, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." Even if you are not going, you should pray that God will send others out. Then you will probably feel God sending you out!

B. We Need Trained Witnesses – Jesus spent 3 years training & teaching His disciples to preach the Gospel. Don't you think you need some training to be a witness as well? Starting the second Wednesday night in December, I will lead a video witnessing course entitled, "The Way of the Master." Will you make a commitment now to come?

I want to go ahead & give you some witness training.

1. Learn Some Exploratory Questions – If you ask the average person, “Are you a Christian”, perhaps most will say, “Yes” or “I believe so.” But that doesn’t mean that they *are* Christians. But 2 questions will help you see their true spiritual condition. So what are the 2 questions? You may want to write these down: “Do you know that you have eternal life?” The unbeliever will either answer that question with a “No,” or “I hope so.” The second question is this, “If you were to die tonight, and God asked you, “Why should I let you into heaven, what would you say?” Most will give some form of a works answer. They will say, “Because I am a good person.” Or, “Because I go to church.” Or, “Because I keep the 10 Commandments.” When they give such an answer, you need to share the correct answer, which is something like, “Because I repented of my sins and placed my faith in Jesus, who died for my sins on the cross.”

2. Give Your Testimony – Many people are willing to listen to a personal testimony. Also, they will not likely try to deny your own experience. Most of you will never preach from a pulpit, but you should be able to give someone a testimony of your conversion and salvation. Rev. 12:11 says, “And they overcome him (the devil) by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony.”

3. Share the Word of God – Again, Paul said in v.17, “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” We are saved by faith in Christ, and the only way we will believe is by hearing the Word of God. Inviting someone to church is good, but if that’s all you do & they do not come, they will not hear the Gospel. If possible, you need to go ahead & share with them the Word of God. Remember, Isa. 55:11 says, “My word ... shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please.” Paul said in Rom. 1:16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” There is power in the Word of God. Share it!

Do you know the gospel message? Everyone can learn the Roman Road plan of salvation. Show them their need by share with them Romans 3:10, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” Then share Romans 3:23, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Then Romans 6:23 says, “the wages of sin is death....” We need to be saved, or we will die in our sins & be separated from God forever. But Romans 5:8 says, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Christ died in our place. Now we can be saved. How? Romans 10:9 says, “that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” Ask them if they are willing to trust in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. If so, share Romans 10:13, “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.” These are verses that every Christian ought to know.

4. At the Very Least, Invite People to Church or a Bible Study - That is one way people can hear the Gospel & be saved. That is what a group of us will do this afternoon. Will you join us? Will you take some revival fliers & invite others to our revival?

Believe it or not, training is not enough. There is something else we need.

C. We Need Empowered Witnesses – Rescuing souls from the grip of sin is not an easy task. We are not naturally inclined to witness. So we need power from on high to be witnesses for Jesus. And that is what Jesus promised. He said in Acts 1:8, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Pray for the power to win souls. If you think you can’t do it, pray for the power to enable you to do it. The Lord can clothe even a child with that power. He can clothe a humble Christian woman with the power to witness. Every Christian can receive that power. If you trust God, He will empower you and enable you to witness.

So we need witnesses, trained, sent out, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Then:

D. We Need Intentional Witnesses – What I mean by that is we need to “seek out” those who have never heard. As I said earlier, people have a natural tendency to stay away from church and from exposing themselves to the convicting truth of God’s Word. And so Jesus said that He was come to seek and to save that which is lost (Lk. 19:10). The fact is unsaved people will not come to Christ on their own. They must be sought after by Christ working through His people. We must be like Jesus, and seek out the lost.

Conclusion: God says something in v.15b to motivate us to be witnesses for Him. Notice what Paul says quoting from Isaiah, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!” If I were to take my sock & shoes off, you would see that my feet are no more beautiful than your in terms of physical appearance. There is little we can do to our feet that would cause them to be an object of beauty in the physical sense. But God calls beautiful the feet of His messengers of the gospel. As they say, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Though we do not consider feet to be beautiful, God says that the feet of those who travel about, sharing the gospel, are beautiful. If you are interested in pleasing God, there is nothing you can do that will please Him more than sharing the Gospel with the lost, especially as a missionary. More than anything, God wants people to be saved!

Are you willing to commit yourself to being used as a witness? Are you willing to be trained as a witness? If so, come forward and make that commitment. Has God called you to preach the gospel? Then come, and make a commitment to accept that calling. Has God laid someone on your heart for you to go witness to? Then come, and make a commitment to go and tell them about Jesus.

I briefly shared the Gospel this morning. Is there someone here today who would like to be saved? Then come forward, & I will be happy to lead you in a prayer to receive Jesus as your Savior. Or if you have already believed in Jesus, but haven’t made it public, I invite you to obey Christ, & present yourself for baptism. Or if you are a baptized believer, and God is leading you to become a member of this church, then we invite you to come forward today.

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 3, “God’s Covenants” (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Hershel Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco: Word Books, 1977); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Charles H. Spurgeon, *Spurgeon’s Expository Encyclopedia*, Vol. 13 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 317-325; . Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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