



The Round Church at  
**St Andrew the Great**  
Cambridge

A Sermon Preached  
on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2005  
by Mark Ashton

10p

Romans chapter 9:30 – 10:21

**Coming through Loud and Clear**

Introduction

Forgive me if this is the first time you have joined us for one of our studies in Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome, but we are going to start this week where we ended last week, at the end of chapter 9 of the letter with:

(1) Stumbling on Jesus Christ

(9:30 – 10:4)

Because, as we saw then, that stone mentioned in the last verse of chapter 9 is Jesus: *As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame"* (v 9:33). Paul argues that, for everyone, Jesus is either a stumbling block, or a stepping stone.

a) The Jews

And Paul is dismayed at how, for his own nation, the Jews, Jesus was proving to be a stumbling block: *Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved* (v 10:1). [Incidentally, let's just note that the truth about hell (that some people are not saved) is actually more upsetting for Christians, than for non-Christians: Paul's anguish over the fate of the Jews is inescapable in these chapters].

After all, the Jews were the ones who took God seriously: *What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it* (vv 9:30-31). They were zealous for God. They believed He existed. They believed He wanted them to behave in a certain way. And they tried their hardest to do so. What had gone wrong? *but Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works.... For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness* (vv 9:31-32a, 10:2-3). The law of righteousness of 9:31 tells us to be good, but it also tells us that we can never be good enough for God, however hard we try. We always fall short; and so the law makes it clear that we must find forgiveness, if we are going to be right with God. In fact, the moral law conducts us straight to Jesus Christ, Who alone provides the forgiveness we need if we are to stand before God: *Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes* (v 10:4) Christ is where the law leads you, if you take it seriously.

But the Jews would not accept that: *Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness* (v 10:3) They wanted their own righteousness. They were determined to stand before God by their own efforts (moral and religious), to be judged on their own merits. Like a spiritual Frank Sinatra, they wanted to stand in the centre of the religious stage and croon into the microphone, "I did it my way." In fact, like a spoilt child, if they could not have their

own righteousness, they would not have one at all. It is that word submit that is so hard for us, isn't it? *Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness* (v 10:3). We hate the indignity of having to admit we are helpless, we can't save ourselves, and we need to be rescued. How we hate to look fools! Do you remember the story of the small boy, playing at being a spaceman, who put a porcelain vase over his head as a space helmet and it got stuck? His Mum tried everything she knew to get it off, but it just would not come. So she rang dad and asked if she could break it, and he said "Certainly not!" It was very valuable and she was to take the boy to hospital, to get it safely removed. But the trouble was the dad had the car at work, and she would have to go by bus. She just could not face the embarrassment of a journey to A&E by public transport, accompanied by a small boy with an inverted vase instead of a head. So she decided to put his school cap on top! But it is far more undignified even than that, far more damaging to human pride, to have to submit to God's righteousness, finally to admit that I cannot make it to heaven by myself and instead to cry out for His mercy. Have you done that? Have you suffered that indignity?

### **b) The Non-Jews**

It was far harder for the religious Jews than for the non-Jews, the Gentiles, because according to Paul they have discovered it, without ever trying to get to God by keeping the moral law. *What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith;... Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes* (vv 9:30, 10:4). (look onto 10:20: *And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me."*) So the Gentiles too stumbled on Jesus Christ, but in an entirely different sense. It was as though they found Him by accident. It was like a cheat in a video game where you press the right combination of buttons and it allows you to skip a whole level. The Gentiles knew that they did not have a hope, and so they found it easy to accept that Jesus Christ had done for them what they could not do for themselves; while the Jews, very aware of their own privileges, could not believe that they did not deserve something from God, and so the offer of free grace in Jesus was an obstacle to the Jews, a stumbling block. They did not accept:

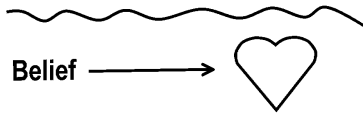
### **2) The Easy Access we have to God via Jesus Christ**

*Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them"* (v 10:5). Either we have to hope to find eternal life by keeping the entire law (which cannot be done), or we have to let God save us. *But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:* (vv 6-8). Verses 6 and 7 refer to the incarnation (bringing Jesus down from heaven) and the resurrection (bringing Jesus up from the dead). Both were necessary for us to be saved. Neither were things we could possibly do for ourselves. But we do not have to do them, because [*But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved* (vv 8-9)]: God has done it for us. If you and I could save ourselves Jesus would never have come from heaven to save us. But He has come, and He died for our sins and He rose again for our salvation. And that gospel message, that word, is very near to us. He is just a prayer away from every one of us. God does not set impossible hurdles before you and me, and invite us to leap over them in order to come into His presence. He has come down to us, like a kind adult with a small child. He has stooped right down and invites us to look into His face. This week I watched that film about the life of Ray Charles, "Ray". It is not exactly Christian, but there is a great incidental remark in it, when Ray Charles' mother says to him in his childhood: "There ain't nothing free in this life, except Jesus." "There ain't nothing free in this life, except Jesus."

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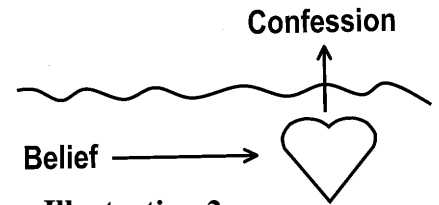
*your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (vv 6-13).*

We believe and confess. We are not to play at being God. We are to believe and confess. Notice the word (the gospel) is (according to verse 8) in your mouth and in your heart. Those two go together. *That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be*



**Illustration 1**

*saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (vv 9-10).* We might think that because salvation cannot be obtained by keeping the outward moral



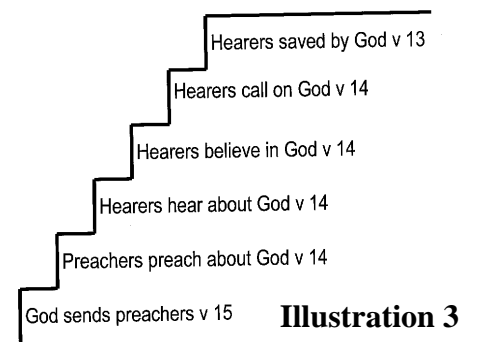
**Illustration 2**

law as the Jews thought, then salvation is nothing more than an inner, invisible, spiritual response to God, hidden in our hearts. But Paul will not let us separate belief and confession here. He is saying that what happens deep in our hearts [Illustration 1] must be also immediately audible on our lips. [Illustration 2] It must be visible, or audible. Christian faith which does not consist of a miraculous inner trust in God in a person’s heart is not Christian faith. But nor is it Christian faith, if that does not at once show above the surface of that person’s life. And Paul supports his view with two further Old Testament quotations: *As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame”*(v 11) (which he’d already quoted in 9:33). *For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (vv 12-13).*

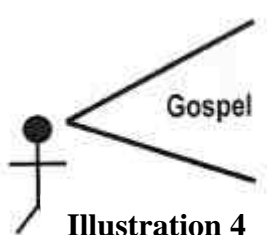
All we have to do is to call out for mercy because God has done all the rest, so don’t play at being God in your life, i.e. trying to save yourself, but let God be God: He’s just a prayer away—believe and confess, which is to tell other people about Him.

**3) How God’s voice goes out**

Paul’s quotation from Joel 2 in verse 13 is one step in a linked sequence: *for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”* (vv 13-15). If we set them out in reverse, from verse 15 back to verse 13, they look like this [Illustration 3]. Paul did not mean ‘preaching’ in a sense confining it to the activity I am now involved in—a preacher preaching a sermon from a pulpit—He meant proclamation in the widest sense of verse 15b: *“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”* Anyone who in any way brings the good news. Paul used the word here for a ‘herald’—a herald was someone who was given

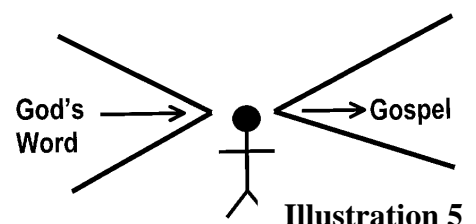


**Illustration 3**



**Illustration 4**

a message and told to proclaim it. A self-appointed herald is a contradiction in terms. A herald has nothing to say unless it is given to him. So the gospel is derivative. It does not originate with human speakers. It is not like this [Illustration 4]. It has to be like this [Illustration 5]. So unless you hear another



**Illustration 5**

voice, another word, coming through in this sermon, other than the voice and words of Mark Ashton, you should ignore the sermon. If it originates with me, it must be ignored.

So finally,

- **Did the Jews get a raw deal?**

Was that sequence of steps in verses 13 –15 available to them? Certainly! Says Paul. Israel was without excuse. *But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: “Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, “I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.” And Isaiah boldly says, “I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.” But concerning Israel he says, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people”* (vv 16-21) It is a pathetic picture. Faith was available to them, because they were hearing the message about Christ (v17). God was holding out His hands to them in passionate appeal (v 21). The Gentiles were not very bright theologically (vv 19-20), but they had got there. So the Jews had only themselves to blame.

This is the other side of the puzzle we faced in chapter 9 where Paul spoke of God’s sovereign right to choose whomever He liked to save. Not one of us can save ourselves. We have to be saved by God. But it appears we can damn ourselves. It is like the tide coming in to a rock pool. Think of a sea anemone, fastened to a rock, when the tide comes flooding in it is all closed up (**top picture**), until the seawater reaches it. Then suddenly out come these gorgon-like tentacles to sway in the current (**bottom picture**).

There is nothing whatsoever that little anemone can do to bring the tide in (nor to stop it coming in). All it can do is avail itself of it when it comes. Or it could choose not to. It could stay closed. You and I can do nothing whatsoever to bring the tide of God’s grace into our lives, nor can we stop it. And it has gone out into all the earth—not a tide of water, but a voice, a message—*“Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world”* (v 18b). The word that is near you. But we can stay closed. We can refuse to hear. We can cling to our own righteousness and not call on the Lord for mercy. Let’s make this communion a calling, a plea to God for mercy, and not a clinging to my own merit.



*(All scripture quoted is from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.)*