

**God's Role for Us in His Rescue Plan for the Unsaved**  
**~Romans 9:30-10:1**

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Last weekend was Thanksgiving. And like many of you, our family had a turkey for Thanksgiving dinner. Cooking a large turkey is no small thing. It requires a fairly concerted effort to transform a raw turkey into a stuffed turkey that's ready to be eaten. Lori and I have been doing this for about 25 years. I think my Mom helped Lori cook her first turkey early in our marriage. I think I remember my Mom stuffing the turkey and helping with some of other things. But then when my Mom could not help us with this, Lori got me involved in the process.

I discovered early on that I would have some specific roles to fulfill in the turkey transformation process. Lori would purchase the turkey. But she assigned me the job of actually putting my hands and arm into the turkey when necessary. Lori does not like reaching inside dead animals. So I am the one who gets to pull out the neck and the little bag containing the other inner parts of the turkey. Then since we stuff our turkey, I have become the turkey stuffer. I also get the privilege of lugging the bird to the oven. Then Lori tends to it throughout the day.

When the turkey finishes cooking, she has me oversee the carving or cutting up of the turkey. Then Lori serves the turkey and take all the credit for a wonderful meal which I don't mind. But in our family at least, I have my little role to play in transforming a cold raw unstuffed turkey into a hot carved platter of meat that serves as the main course of the meal. It's great working together to see this project through to completion. We work as a team towards the ultimate goal of serving hot turkey. Now, just as Lori gives me a little role to play in the turkey process, God gives us roles to play in His great world.

God is completely self-sufficient. He does not need us to accomplish His purposes in the world. But we see throughout the Bible that He invites people to join Him in His saving and restoring work. God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. God called Mary to bear the baby Jesus who would become the deliverer. Jesus called the disciples to follow Him. Eleven of them remained faithful to carry the good news to the ends of the earth. God continues to call us to join Him and play a role in His life saving work.

Today, we are going to talk about God's plan to rescue unsaved people. By unsaved, I mean anyone not yet been saved by God from their sin, spiritual death and the devil. Since everyone is born a sinner, we need God's rescuing work in our lives to save us from our sins and their soul destroying impact. God has already provided the means for salvation. That's why Jesus came. Jesus suffering, death and resurrection opened the way for people to be reconciled with God and

rescued from their sin. From the historical event of Jesus sacrifice on the cross comes the message of salvation or the good news.

God wants this good news to get to everyone. When people hear the good news, they have opportunity to receive, accept and believe it. When they do that, God saves them. God's rescuing and restoring work comes into their life. God could accomplish all of this by Himself. But God has chosen to include us in this great rescuing work. Where do we fit in God's plan to rescue the unsaved?

That's what we will discover today as we conclude the series of messages entitled Living with Mission in Mind – Growing as God's good news messengers. To help us discover our role, we're going to follow the story of another Christian who had great concern for unsaved people around him. In fact, he experienced great sorrow and unceasing anguish in his heart over them. His name was Paul. He saw the vast majority of His people, the Jews, reject what God had done through Jesus. Though they were the people of God from the Old Testament, they had not received God's good news message. Though Jesus came from the Jews, a vast majority even today reject Him as the way to God.

So we will see Paul wrestle with this. But we will also see him show how God has made a way for anyone, Jew or Gentile (which means non-Jew) to be saved. As we walk through Paul's reasoning, we will discover the role God has for us in His rescuing plan. So if you're a Christian and have people in your life who are not saved, I pray you will be encouraged today by God's continuing work to rescue them from their unsaved state. And I also pray that we will clearly see our part in His plan so we can fill that role and hopefully see people around us come to Christ. All this comes from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 9, starting in verse 30. It's on page 803 in the Bibles in front of you.

**Romans 9:30-10:15 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup>What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; <sup>31</sup>but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. <sup>32</sup>Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, <sup>33</sup>as it is written,

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

**10** Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. <sup>2</sup>For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. <sup>3</sup>For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. <sup>4</sup>For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

<sup>5</sup>For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. <sup>6</sup>But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) <sup>7</sup>“or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). <sup>8</sup>But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); <sup>9</sup>because, 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. <sup>10</sup>For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. <sup>11</sup>For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” <sup>12</sup>For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. <sup>13</sup>For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

<sup>14</sup>How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? <sup>15</sup>And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

Paul writes to Christians in Rome. There are both Jewish and Gentile Christians in this church. There seems to have been some tension between these two groups. Part of it might have arisen because of a change in the make up of the overall church. When the church began, it was completely Jewish. All the disciples were Jewish. All the people sent out from the Jerusalem church were Jewish. But the vast majority of Jews rejected Christ. So the mission spread to the Gentiles. More and more of them received the message and believed it. By the time Romans is written, it seems there were more Gentiles in the church than Jews. It may even have been the case that some Gentile Christians looked down on the Jewish Christians maybe because they held onto their Jewish traditions.

So Paul writes Romans partially to address and explain what’s going on. In Romans 9-11, he specifically addresses the issue of the wide scale rejection of Christ by the Jewish nation. This grieves him greatly. But he does not believe everything is hopeless. He explains what has happened and then what God is doing to address this. Within this argument we will find our role in God’s saving work.

### **Why had most Israelites rejected Christ?**

Paul tells us, **Israel pursued righteousness not by faith but as if it was based on works.** The passage begins by explaining this. Verse 30. “What shall we say then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith. But then verse 31 – but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching the law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.” (9:30-32).

It seems Paul says that his fellow Israelites were sincere in their pursuit of righteousness or being right with God. But they went about it in a futile way. They thought they could pursue this righteousness solely by keeping the works of the law. But no one could completely keep the law except Jesus Himself. He was the only one who kept the law perfectly. So when a person comes to Christ by faith, we get clothed in His righteousness.

But Israel stumbled over Christ according to verse 32. But they didn't see it as a stumble. They continued to pursue righteousness solely through doing the works of law. Paul recognizes their earnest desire in 10:2 – “For I bear witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.” So they had a passion for God. But their passion was misdirected resulting in a fatal error. Verse 3 – For being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own (righteousness) they did not submit to God's righteousness.”

So let's think about this. If you know someone who had a passion or zeal for God and pursued keeping God's law or following the Bible what might you conclude about them? Sounds pretty good. They are probably Christians and saved people. Sounds pretty good. But look at what Paul says about them in 10:1. “Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.” So even though they pursued God's law by works and though they had a zeal for God, they weren't saved.

I don't know about you, but I find that frightening. So many people today fit this pattern. They think that by doing some good works or going to church occasionally or having some passion for God or a higher power means they are okay. They are at peace with trying to establish their own righteousness. But in the end, all such efforts fall short. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declares that no one can obtain God's salvation by works. It is only by faith. I suspect that these verses describe people you know who are maybe in your family. They have some sense of morality. They might say that they believe in God. But they also believe that solely by doing certain good deed or religious rites or by living a good life they'll be okay. But they still need salvation!

Thankfully, the passage does not end there. This leads us to the next point in His argument. **But righteousness and ultimately salvation is not obtained by works but by faith.** That's what he referred to back in 9:30. That's what he talks about in 10:6 which says “But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, “who will ascend to heaven?” that is to bring Christ down or “Who will descend into the abyss” (that is to bring Christ up from the dead. But what does it say? “The word is near you in your mouth and in your heart:” (that is the word of faith).” He quotes

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 here where Moses spoke to the Israelites. Way back then, Moses encouraged the Israelites that they could keep the word of the Lord, but not solely by their own works. They needed faith in God to keep the commands of God. Now Paul applies Moses' words to Christ. No one can be needed to go up to heaven to bring Christ down. Nor could anyone go into the grave to raise Christ up for God had already done that. Instead they needed to trust God and what He had done in and through Jesus.

Then comes one of the most famous texts from the book of Romans and a critical turn in this passage. It will show how anyone Jewish or Gentile can be saved by faith. Verses 9-10. "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. For with the heart one believes and is justified and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." So this is the next piece of the argument. **Salvation by faith happens when a person confesses by mouth that Jesus is Lord and believes in their heart that God raised Jesus from the dead. Then God will save them.** This confession and belief is not some casual statement of our mouths "Jesus is Lord." Yeah, I'll say that if I get a prize." Now to confess Jesus as Lord meant you accepted that belonged to the Lord and now devoted your life to Him. You transferred your allegiance to this Lord. You acknowledged a change in ownership over your life. Sin no longer owned you. You no longer owned you. The Lord owns you.

Belief in our hearts is not simply agreeing with a historical claim. It's not "I believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, just like I believe WWII happened." No it's saying I believe that Jesus is resurrected and that accomplished the defeat of sin through it; my sins are forgiven forever and I now devote the totality of my life to the one who has released me. I serve a living Saviour, not an idea. And I don't have to worry about Judgment Day because I already know the verdict on that day regarding me – Not guilty. Paul notes this in verse 11 – "For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." We don't have to fear shame on Judgment Day because we are not guilty forever because of Christ.

The good news is that this offer is available to anyone. Verse 12. "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. So Paul summarizes this in verse 13 – **For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**" So Romans 9:30-10:13 show that anyone can receive God's salvation by faith. That includes the people we know today who are unsaved.

But remember our big question for today? Where do we fit in to God's plan to rescue the unsaved? We now come to the answer. So verse 13 says "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." That's great. Then verses 14 – "But how will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? Verse 15 - And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" Here's where we come in.

**But how will they get this message? God sends us to bring His good news to the unsaved.** Did you recognize the end of verse 15? The part about feet and good news? That's part of our theme verse for 2019/20. Paul quotes part of Isaiah 52:7 which is found on the front page of your bulletins. "How beautiful are the feet of those who brings good news!" But in my translation, Paul changes one word in Romans 10:15. He substitutes "preach" for "bring."

But in some ways, I think "bring" and "preach" are related. To bring someone good news, you have to tell them the good news. To preach literally means to herald or announce something. So we must not conclude that it's only preachers today who must bring the good news to the unsaved. All of us are called to bring or announce the good news.

This is the part God calls us to play in reaching those who do not know Him. You and I are called to be these messengers of good news. God calls us to be part of the chain that brings the message of Christ to those around us who don't know Him. Hopefully we have a heart desire and we're praying to God for them to be saved. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But how will they call on him whom they have not believed? And how will they believe if they have never heard of who Jesus really is? And how are they to hear without you or me bringing them the message? And how can we bring the message unless we actually go to them? So we must deliver the good news about Christ's coming and God's saving plan to rescue from sin, death and the devil.

**Then it's up to the unsaved person and the Holy Spirit for their response.** If they by faith believe in their heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and confess Jesus as Lord, the Holy Spirit regenerates them and gives them new spiritual life. They are justified and adopted into God's family and saved and we can rejoice with them.

Now this all sounds great in theory. But it's quite another thing to actually bring this good news to unsaved people around us. It can be uncomfortable to bring up the good news and people's need for Christ. We face their rejection of the good news or maybe their mocking or their irritation. But at some point we have to decide if we value our personal

comfort more than the possibility of them hearing the good news. Someone has written that we are willing to give up our personal safety only when something else becomes more important to us than our safety. A mother bird is willing to give up her own personal safety when a predator threatens her babies. She is willing to risk her life because her baby's lives have become more important to her than her own safety. "The call to evangelism is a call to turn our lives outward from focusing on ourselves and our needs to focusing on God and on others made in his image who are still alienated from him, and in need of salvation from sin and guilt." Mark Dever – the Gospel and Personal Evangelism.

**So we need to turn to the Lord for the courage, strength and compassionate love to obey this call.** In my own life, I try to proclaim the good news each week during the Sunday morning message. That is because I believe that churches, like ours, have people in them who think they are Christians but aren't. They are people who "pursue righteousness" not by faith but as if it were based on works. So they may think that going to church or doing enough good deeds adds up to outweigh the bad. So they think they are right with God. But righteousness or right standing before God can only happen when one receives Christ as Savior and Lord by faith. So, I try to bring the good news every Sunday morning.

Sometimes I get to bring up the good news one on one. A couple of years ago, I was returning from the annual retreat I go to in Wisconsin. Our flight from Chicago to Edmonton was cancelled. There was no possibility of another flight that day. So the airline put us up in a hotel overnight. When that happens, you get to know some of the people on the flight because you are all in the same boat or airport waiting area; you end up at the same hotel; you travel the same bus back and forth. So I ended up talking a bit with this one guy. I believe he was of the Hindu faith. Inevitably, he asked me what I did for a living. So I shared with him that I was a pastor of a church in St. Albert. We began to discuss our faith. I asked him if his faith helped him and how involved he was in it. I can't remember what all he said. But somehow, the question of only one way to God came up. I talked about how Christianity claims that you only come to God through Christ. But I also tried to point out how every faith makes its own exclusive claims. He would have none of that. He said it was only Christians who said their way was the right way. I tried to talk to him further about it. I tried to emphasize the logic behind the Christian faith – and that it makes sense that if Christ made the sacrifice, you could only come to God through Him. He still would have none of it. I think I tried to share about the hope I live with and the joy of knowing Christ and help in my times of suffering. But eventually we moved on to something else and that was it.

I don't know if those words made any difference or where this guy is at today. But I found that if I could keep my cool and not get into an argument, the conversation could happen. There was mutual respect and consideration. I pray that maybe that is one link in the chain of him one day calling out to Christ. I think we can maintain our convictions and gain a hearing if we share humbly and respectfully.

In the same way, you and I regularly need to be reminded and jolted out of our comfort zones to remember that the people around us who don't know Christ are on their way to death and hell. Our own personal grief over this must overcome our craving for comfort, so we can share the good news with them. We need to pray for God's help to us as we overcome our discomfort and share the good news with those around us.

This is part of the overall approach towards the unsaved that we have talked about these past 6 weeks. Love - Our motivation is love – for God and our neighbors. Pray for God to draw them to Himself. Seek – opportunities and open doors to go deeper in conversation. Invite non-believing friends to experience Christian community. But we must also share the actual sharing of the Gospel – the Good News – the word of Christ – Romans 10:17.

So share the good news and their need to call on the Lord to be saved. Share your own faith story. How/when you came to Christ; how Christ has led you and helped you; that your heart's desire and prayer is for them to also be saved and experience salvation from God. God sent someone to bring the good news to us. This has brought us great comfort and help. God will help and empower us to bring the good news to others.

Maybe you have been sitting there today and God has been speaking to you. He has revealed to you that you are not saved. Maybe you thought you were all these years but now you see clearly that you have not. So will you call on the name of the Lord to be saved today? Will you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in the very depths of your heart and soul that God raised Jesus from the dead?

If you want to say yes to that now, please slip up your hand; or pray with someone you came with today who knows Christ; or come forward for prayer after the service; or pray along with me.