

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, November 20, 2016**

LET THOSE WHO KNOW

Romans 10:13-21

Brother John was a timid man who dreaded speaking in public. This may have been one of the main reasons he decided to become a monk and live a monastic life. When it was his turn to give a devotional message in the morning chapel service, he was terrified. With his knees knocking and his hands trembling, he faced his congregation and managed to say: “Do you know what I’m going to say this morning?”

“No,” answered the assembled monks. “Neither do I,” said John before he bolted from the chapel.

The abbot of the monastery was not pleased and told John to give the chapel message the next day. So, he got up in front of the monks the next morning and again he said: “Do you know what I’m going to say?”

Based on the previous day, the monks all said: “Yes.” To which John replied: “Then you don’t need me to tell you.” Again, he fled.

The abbot was incensed, and ordered John to give the message the next day, and to do it right this time, or else. The following morning, he stood in front of the monks a third time and said: “Do you know what I’m going to say?”

Uncertain, some of the monks nodded their heads and said: “Yes!” while others shook their heads and said: “No!”

“Ah,” said Brother John, “then let those who know tell those who don’t know.”

If they let it sink in, it was a better sermon than anyone expected from Brother John. “Let those who know tell those who don’t know.” It expresses well the message of Paul in Romans 10 about the importance of your witness and mine – about the importance of sharing the gospel message with people all around us and all around the world who do not know the great good news of Jesus and His saving love.

“Let those who know tell those who don’t know.” It is not the whole of it, but isn’t this a huge part of the Great Commission Jesus has given His followers in this world?

THE CHAIN OF EVENTS IN SALVATION

In looking at verses 14-15 last Sunday, we took note of the divinely-ordained and orchestrated chain of events by which people come to a personal and living faith in Jesus Christ. Ordinarily, this is the way God brings unbelievers to saving faith in Him. Paul has declared in verse 13 that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” But calling on the

Lord in this way depends on believing in Him. Believing in Him depends on knowing about Him. Knowing about Jesus depends on hearing about Him. It depends on being exposed to the content of the gospel, whether through preaching or personal witness, in a book or blog or some other media that didn't exist in the 1st century when Paul wrote the Letter to the Romans. Hearing the gospel message depends on someone telling or sharing the gospel. And sharing the gospel depends on someone being sent. Sent on a mission from God.

Unless witnesses (or messengers or ambassadors) are sent out by God, who will share the gospel message with those who need it?

Unless the gospel is proclaimed, who will ever hear of Jesus and His saving love?

Unless they hear the gospel, who will ever believe in Jesus?

Unless they believe, who will ever call on the name of the Lord?

Unless they call on the Lord in repentance and faith, who will be saved?

Each link in the chain of salvation is essential. For, as Paul says in verse 17: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." "The message" is the evangel, the good news of salvation. And "the word of Christ" is the gospel *from* Christ and *about* Christ, in whom and through whom all who call on His name in faith are saved. Unless the message of the gospel is heard and understood, it cannot result in faith. And it will not be heard and understood if it is not shared. If *we* do not share it with others.

"Let those who know tell those who don't know."

WORD ARE NECESSARY

You have probably heard this saying, often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, that goes like this: "Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words." There are at least a couple things to be said about this. First, there is no reliable evidence that Francis ever actually said it. Regardless of who said it, it has gotten a lot of traction over the years, because we intuitively understand that if our sharing of the gospel and our personal testimonies to the saving power of the Lord Jesus are to have the greatest impact, the witness of our words has to be matched by the witness of our lives. Jesus calls us not just to talk the talk, but to walk the walk as well. Not only are we to put the gospel into words. We need to incarnate it in our actions.

But there is a problem with this saying, which is the second thing to be said about it. The problem is the inference you can easily draw, whether or not it is directly implied, that the gospel can be preached effectively *without* words, or that words are *not* necessary in sharing the gospel. Paul insists that words *are* necessary, for the gospel must be heard in order to be understood.

Where does faith come from? From *hearing the message* – or, I’m sure Paul would agree, from *reading* the message of the gospel with comprehension. And, as Paul makes clear, the message that must be heard, the message our minds must comprehend and our hearts must embrace, is the word of Christ – the good news that is both *from* Him and *about* Him.

Is it good and right and necessary for us to live out the gospel as followers of the Lord Jesus? You bet it is. But the witness of our lives must be accompanied by our witness in words. Words *are* necessary if the good news of God’s saving love for a world gone wrong is to be heard and understood.

“Let those who know tell those who don’t know.”

The Greek word that means “gospel” or “good news” is the word *evangelion* (or “evangel”), which refers specifically to God’s gracious provision of forgiveness, salvation, peace with God, and new and eternal life for sinners like us through His Son Jesus Christ, who took on our flesh and blood, lived a life without sin among us, and freely gave His life as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Theologian J. I. Packer (best known for his magnum opus *Knowing God*) says that to evangelize is “to exhort” (or invite) “sinners to accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and to serve Him as their King.” Evangelism, he writes, “is the issuing of a call to turn, as well as to trust; it is the delivering, not merely of a divine invitation to receive a Savior, but of a divine command to repent of sin.” The gospel, therefore, “is a summons to [both] faith and repentance.” He describes evangelism as “a work of communication in which Christians make themselves mouthpieces for God’s message of mercy to sinners” (Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God*, 39-41, 70).

This promise of mercy, of forgiveness and salvation and peace with God, is given to everyone who believes. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord in faith will be saved. God will never turn away anyone who comes to Him in true repentance and faith. You can bet your life on this. But no one will ever come to God in true repentance and faith apart from what the Westminster Confession calls “effectual calling” (WC, chapter 10), which, in Packer’s words, is “the operation [of the Holy Spirit] whereby God causes sinners to understand and respond to the gospel.... (B)y it, God gives (us) new hearts, freeing (us) from slavery to sin, abolishing (our) inability to know and do God’s truth, and leading (us) actually to turn to God and trust Christ as (our) Savior” (Packer, 113).

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO DON’T BELIEVE?

A question, however, still remains. It is the primary question Paul seeks to answer here in Romans 10. It is really several inter-connected questions:

- Why do some people hear the message of the gospel and reject it, while others hear and respond in faith? (Paul acknowledges the puzzle of unbelief in verses 16-21.)
- Why have so many of the Jews failed to embrace the gospel?
- How did their rejection of the gospel serve God’s sovereign purposes?

- And what does it mean for the Jews that Gentiles – non-Jews like most of us – were included in God’s plan for salvation?

These are good questions. Hearing the gospel is necessary for salvation, but hearing it is not enough. You have to respond to it with repentance and trust in Christ. But not everybody does. That was – and is – the case with the Jews, as Paul says in verse 16: “But not all the Israelites accepted the good news.” Some did, but many – most – did not.

In verse 18, Paul asks: Why? Was it because they didn’t hear the gospel? Was it because they were not exposed to the message of the gospel? Without hesitation or reservation Paul answers his own question: “Of course they (heard).” Through the apostles and other believers, the gospel spread far and wide throughout the Roman world, reaching Jews and Gentiles alike. To establish the point, Paul quotes Psalm 19:4, which says:

Their voice has gone out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

So the Jewish people can’t claim that they haven’t heard about Jesus. They can’t use ignorance of Jesus and the gospel as an excuse.

Then, in verse 19, Paul asks: “Did Israel not understand?” Not understand what? Did they not understand the revolutionary nature of the gospel? And did they not understand from the Scriptures that the gospel would be taken to the Gentiles, and that large numbers of Gentiles would believe and become followers of Jesus?

They should have understood, he says, since both Moses and Isaiah prophesied God’s grace to the Gentiles. Still in verse 19, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 32:21, where Moses says to Israel:

I will make you envious by those who are not a nation;
I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.

Then, in verse 20, he quotes Isaiah 65:1:

I was found by those who did not seek me;
I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.

Which only goes to show how amazing and incomprehensible God’s sovereign grace is. And how blessed we are that this grace – and this God of grace – found us. Because it is about people like us (almost all of us, since only a few of us are Jewish) that Moses and Isaiah are speaking.

With regard to the unbelief of the people of Israel, John Stott says: “In chapter 9 (Paul) attributed (their unbelief) to God’s purpose of election, on account of which many were passed by, and only a remnant was left, an Israel within Israel.” In chapter 10, however, he attributes it to Israel’s own disobedience. “Their fall,” he says, “was their fault.” Which leaves us, Stott says, with “the antinomy” – the apparent incompatibility of two unavoidable

truths – “between divine sovereignty and human responsibility” (Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 289, 290). You can’t escape either one.

ALL DAY LONG

Nor can you escape the fact that still today the door remains open, and the invitation from God to draw near to Him in faith is still extended, to Jews and non-Jews alike. In verse 21, Paul quotes Isaiah 65:2, where the Lord Himself speaks of His patient, persevering love. He says:

All day long I have held out my hands
to a disobedient and obstinate people.

Do you hear that? *All day long*. This is a picture of God’s gracious, loving heart. *All day long* He holds out His hands. *All day long* He waits with His arms open wide to receive anyone and everyone who will come to Him. *All day long*. Even today. But still, many do not respond. Many will not respond. And it is not just the Jews.

But there are some – many – who *will* respond to the gospel in saving faith. But how can they believe and call on the Lord in faith if they have never heard about Jesus? How can they hear without someone to tell them? And how will anyone spread the gospel message unless they are sent on a mission from God?

This is *your* mission as a follower of Jesus Christ. This is *our* mission as Christ’s church in this place: *Let those who know tell those who don’t know*. Today. This week. As long as we have breath. And then trust God for the results.

Lord, let it be so in us. Amen.