

GOD'S MESSAGE OF SALVATION

A Call to Faith

We have heard the expression "Pick yourself up by your bootstraps." The picture this brings to mind is that of someone pulling on his or her shoes and as a result being lifted off the ground. In a way, this is rather humorous when we realized the impossibility of it. Of course, the idea of the expression is attempting to communicate is that by *hard work and initiative* a person can rise above his circumstances. People in poverty can work their way out of poverty. People without any education can get an education on their own. We like the idea of people being able to be successful if they will just apply themselves and work hard. This concept is part of the American dream.

The problem with the "dream" is that, as stated, is just that -- a dream or a fantasy. The expression overlooks the underlying foundation of all that has gone before us. Who could educate himself without the benefit of an alphabet, books, and perhaps a tutor. Now, this argument is not to depreciate the significance of the hard work involved in obtaining an education. The hard work is needed but so are all the substantial resources one might use in the process. In the same way, lifting oneself from poverty requires making use of resources beyond the person himself. Consider the situation of a person who has no home and no job. He decides he is going to find a way out of his condition by collecting and selling old newspapers for recycle. If he were successful, then we might say that "he picked himself up by his bootstraps." However, closer examination shows that many people had to give him the newspapers to start with. There had to be a recycle system and a paper industry that needed the product. There was a substantial foundation already provided for him upon which he could build. Again, his application of initiative and hard work was necessary for him to be successful, BUT the most important ingredient was already there and he did nothing to make that happen.

A simpler illustration is that of climbing the stairs from one floor to the next. You walk to the base of the stairs and take one step at a time and eventually get to the next level. You might say "I did it." In a way, you did; but, the most important thing that allowed you to be at the higher level was not your ability and energy but the fact that the steps were there. Someone had already provided the means so that many people can go from one floor to the next.

In the last four verses of Romans Chapter 9 Paul had compared the response of the Gentiles to the Good News of the Gospel of God's Salvation in Jesus Christ with the response of the Israelites. Following the symbolism of getting from one floor to the next, Paul noted that the Gentiles found their way to the next floor and the Israelite had failed to recognize the staircase.

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. 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. Romans 10:1-3

God had dealt with the children of Israel and had given them instructions regarding their relationship to Himself and to others. The Ten Commandments were the basic rudiments of relationships. These could be likened to learning how to walk or climb. The Israelites added many refinements to the basics but did little more than to add "style" to the ability to walk. They practiced their walking and put all the refinements into place because they thought this was what was pleasing to God. They were devoted to God; but, as Paul pointed out "not based on true knowledge." It was as if they had been walking the halls but had not discovered the stairs. They failed to realize that the purpose in their knowing how to walk (the carrying out of the Law) was so they could climb the stairs and arrive at the next level. They thought that keeping the Law (walking the halls) was all there was.

Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." 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). Romans 10:4-7

The end or goal of the Law is to bring us to Jesus so we can be a participant in His righteousness. It is Christ Who lifts us from the earthly plane to the heavenly plane. By placing our trust (belief) in Jesus we place ourselves in His provision and care -- we walk in His way; that is, up the stairs and not just roam the halls on the same level.

In speaking of the Law, Paul quoted Moses "The man who does these things will live by them."

This means the benefit of keeping the law is its own reward; however, it has no power to take us beyond our present existence. We keep the law and we function on the earthly level with the principles of the law as our guide. We can be "successful" in the context of that existence; or we have "the righteousness that is of the law." According to our analogy, we traverse the halls and move around

quite well.

If our righteousness is by **faith**, then we realize that we cannot ever be deserving enough for God (in Christ) to come down from heaven to live among us. We also realize that we do not have power within ourselves to bring Christ back to life after His sacrificial death. God's love and grace prevailed over our lack of merit and His might and power triumphed in place of our inadequacy. He is the Provider and the Builder. He saw our great need and, motivated by His love for us, met the need from His abundance.

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. 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." Romans 10:8-13

If we can't ever do enough to be deserving and we will never have the power to effect a resurrection, then how can we attain to the righteousness that we see in Christ? In other words, how can we be saved since we are without merit and without power? This is an age-old question; however, there is an age-old answer! God's Plan of Salvation has always been "Trust and Obey." Adam knew it and blew it. Noah knew it and built an ark to the saving of his family from the flood. Abraham knew it and down through the ages, the role call of the faithful gives testimony to this truth.

Notice that Paul sees at least two parts to the whole. In verse 10, we see justification as a result of belief or faith. What must we believe? As verse 9 indicates, "God raised Jesus from the dead." This is a summary and conclusion of all that God did for us in Jesus Christ in His taking on our sin, paying the price to redeem us and then gaining victory over death and the grave as demonstrated by His resurrection. Jesus is the Provision by which we are placed in right relationship to God. To believe this truth "in our hearts" means that in every part of "who we are" this truth is assimilated and becomes an integral part of us. The second part of the whole of salvation that Paul mentions is confession. What must we confess? Again, verse 9 tell us. "Jesus is Lord." Just as "God raised Jesus from the dead" is a part of the whole truth of what God did for us in Christ; I believe "confess with the mouth" is only a part of the "expression" of the Lordship of Jesus in our lives. In other words, we do need to say it, **but just saying it is not all there is to it.** (Some may think, "Well, you must really mean it when you say it." There is more to it than just saying it and really meaning it!) The Lordship of Jesus Christ must be expressed (confessed) in every word, thought, and deed. This is the essence of obedience. So, then salvation results from faith which leads to justification and confession of Jesus as Lord, or simply "trust and obey."

This salvation is available to Jews and Gentiles. Paul quoted Old Testament Scripture from Isaiah 28:16 that tells us anyone who puts their trust in the "Chief Cornerstone" will not be confused or ashamed. Salvation works the same for Jews and Gentiles since it is the same Lord Who is over all. Our access to God's provision is to simply ask.

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!" 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." Romans 10:14-21

If we have called upon the name of the Lord and come into His salvation then we will share with others the love that God has given to us. The most loving thing we can do for others is to introduce them to our Heavenly Father. If believing is a requirement, then it is very important that people hear the message from God's word. People cannot believe in something they have never heard about. Not all who hear will believe, but our responsibility is to be sure they have heard.