

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

Rev. Dr. John V. Callahan, Jr.

Sermon Text: Romans 10:1-13

Sermon Title: "Exchanging What's Hokum for the Real Thing" (A Journey through Romans)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

July 24, 2016

{SLIDE 1} Who are the people that are special to us? Who are those near and dear to our hearts? A spouse or a child or children? Grandparents and certain relatives? A friend we have a work or a friend we met at school? A friend we've had forever or a friend we've had for the last few months? We have at least one or two people in our lives, whom are near and dear to us.

And if they are near and dear to us, then we are concerned for their well-being. We want the best for them, always hoping that each day will go as smoothly as possible for them. We don't want them to run into trouble, and if they do we want to help them through it. We don't want bad things to happen to them, and if they do we want to support them in every way. We want to bring them joy when they are sad. We want to calm them down when they are angry. We are concerned about their well-being, and we want the best for them.

{SLIDE 2} And this is especially true, when we see our friends doing the wrong things. We know how

they should act. They know how we should act. There is a certain way we carry ourselves which is right, proper, moral, honest. But when those near and dear to our hearts mess-up, we show our disappointment. We let them know that they have crossed a line, and they had better get back over it and make things right again. We would expect the same from those we care about. If we have sinned in some way, we expect them to show disappointment, and then help us clean of the mess and start over again. We become upset with those special people, because we care so much. We don't want anything bad to happen to them, and we don't want them to do something catastrophic as to ruin their lives permanently.

{SLIDE 3} Paul takes a moment in his letter to the Romans to reflect on his feelings about the nation of Israel. Although Paul is a Roman citizen, Israel is still his nation. Judaism is still his original religion, and he holds a special place for them in his heart. He studied as a Pharisee and tried to become the best Jew he could be. He wanted to surpass his teachers in the knowledge of Jewish custom and practice, and become a beacon for Israel to follow. Little did he know that Jesus would interrupt his plans. Jesus would give him a faith based not on knowledge but on compassion. Paul would become a beacon that would

point people to the Savior of the world.

Paul understands the error of his ways. He understands how he was working against God's will the whole time. He studied Scripture, but he never witnessed how God was working through prophets and priests to bring people to salvation. He could recite God's law without looking it up, and yet he never viewed how God's law was bringing people to God's Son, the Fulfillment of all law. Paul finally woke up. Jesus Christ woke him up, and Paul had a lot of work to do to understand faith and salvation through Christ.

Paul understands the error of his ways, and so he understands the error of Israel's way, the nation near and dear to his heart. "Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for [Israel] is that they may be saved."¹ Paul sees the path they are on. Paul used to walk that path, and it leads nowhere. Just as when we see how our friends and family are living, and we have to say something about it, Paul sees which way the people are going and he has got to do something for them. "I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened."² The Greek word for *zeal* is heat, like having a passion for something or someone and you literally get worked up.

¹ Romans 10:1.

² Romans 10:2.

The Greek word for *enlightened* that Paul uses is knowledge. He says that people are fired up about God but they go about it without really thinking about it.

{SLIDE 4} Here is an example: We might know someone who says that God thinks a certain way or feels a certain way about a certain topic. They are so sure they know the mind of God, but have they checked it out? Have they put this idea against Scripture? Have they fully discerned this idea with prayer and even fasting? Is this really the way God thinks and feels, or is that person spouting some political view from some candidate who is looking for votes? Or, does this come from a pastor who has an agenda to push according to the way he (or even she) looks at the world? That's just an example, but people have zeal for God. They are on fire. But they may not stop to think and discern what God is really doing in the world. Do they consider God's grace and compassion? Do they consider the holiness of God, and how God is trying to impart his holiness on all people? On fire for God, great, but we all need knowledge to back it up. Otherwise, people may find that they are not following God as much as they are getting in the way and delaying God's work.

{SLIDE 5} So, Paul is concerned about his nation,

how people believe there is a God but they do not fill themselves with knowledge about God. Paul says that they are ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and so they have created their own righteousness.³ Actually, they created some form of righteousness that isn't righteousness at all.

We may hear the word used from time to time, especially in church, but many times we hear the word with *self* before it. We hear about self-righteous people who seem to know everything there is to know about everything. How do we view self-righteous people? They are pretty intolerant to any little sin that a person commits. They stand in judgement over others, making snide comments and condemning them to hell. Do we appreciate self-righteous people? No, we don't.

Why are they self-righteous? Have we ever stopped to think why they might be? What has caused them to be self-righteous? Was it something they heard or read? Was it something another person told them, and both of them now unite to judge others? Do they have a zeal for God but they would rather view God as the angry, punishing God who roots out sinners and destroys them? Such people have created their own righteousness, or what they think is righteousness.

³ Cf. Romans 10:3.

This is not righteousness at all, not that which comes from Jesus Christ.

{SLIDE 6} Paul witnessed how his fellow Jewish people were keen observers of God's law. They followed God's law as any good Jew would, and they held tightly to the covenant that they had with God. Such a covenant caused them to be called God's chosen nation. But the people were so attached to the law and covenant that they thought just those things would save them from sin and death. They thought their keen observation would rescue them from all their troubles and assure them life forever with God. As we have said over the last few Sundays, the law doesn't save anybody. The law points out our sin. The law becomes the high mark that we can never achieve. We can never so exactly what the law wants us to do. So we cannot be righteous by our own efforts. We cannot make ourselves right with God, free of all sin and completely safe from death. If the law is too high of a standard to reach, then what we are left with is our sin laughing at us in the face.

{SLIDE 7} There is a righteousness that God has established. It doesn't come from his law or covenant, which are still important things to have from God. It doesn't come from some idea or invention we can come

up with on our own. This righteousness comes from God himself, more specifically from God's Son Jesus Christ. "Christ is the end of the law," Paul says, "so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."⁴ Jesus himself once said in Matthew 5, "Do not think that I have come to destroy the law and the prophets... I have come to fulfill them."⁵ Jesus came to make the law and prophets of God full, full of meaning, full of significance and reality.⁶ The purpose of the law and prophets is to bring people to God. Sadly, they could only accomplish such a thing to an extent. They could only bring people so close to God but not all the way. Jesus Christ is the One who bridges the gap. He brings us all the way. When we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, then we are given the freedom to do what God's law requires. Through Christ we are able to please God, doing what God wants us to do, and do those things with all joy and thanksgiving.

According to Paul this faith, this relationship, with Jesus Christ can be had by all. Christ's righteousness may be given to anyone who believes. The person doesn't have to be a Jew who observes the law of God and lives under a specific covenant. As Paul has

⁴ Romans 10:4.

⁵ Verse 17.

⁶ Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew: Volume 1, The Christbook, Matthew 1-12*, cf. 166.

visited many towns and preached the word of God to many people, he knows that even the Gentiles can hear God's word and believe. They too can accept Christ as Lord and Savior and be rescued from sin.

{SLIDE 8} So, a couple of things happen. We start with following the advice of John Calvin, the founder of the Presbyterian Church, who once said, "The first step to obtaining the righteousness of God is to renounce our own righteousness."⁷ We may have zeal for God but it must always be backed up by knowledge of God. But then our knowledge of God is limited, and so we must always study and prayer, worship and fellowship with others, so we may understand God better. Not completely, just better.

{SLIDE 9} And then, we fill our zeal for God with knowledge. It isn't that hard. It shouldn't take that much effort.

Paul points to Moses once saying that "the person who does these things" – that is, the things of God according to the law – "will live by them."⁸ But Paul is talking about people who live by faith, not by doing the best they can, which they cannot. Those who live by faith in Christ have access to Christ 24/7. Christ is

⁷ John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World*, cf. 281.

⁸ Romans 10:5.

easy to find, if we simply look. It isn't as though our Savior is on some high mountain or stuck at the bottom of some deep cavern. It isn't as though we have to have certain income level to have knowledge of Christ, or we need a college degree with Summa Cum Laude honors. Paul says, "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart."⁹ God promised in Jeremiah 31 that he would put his law in the hearts of those love God. God would give access to all believers, to the point that they wouldn't have to teach each, because they would just know. They would know that God is their God, and God will always be close to them.¹⁰

This happens through faith in Christ. Through faith Christ is close to us. His love and healing and peace are written on our hearts. We gain more understanding of this when we pray and read, when we worship and serve. Our zeal for God grows along with our knowledge of what God wants us to do. Even when that knowledge is not crystal clear at times, we still seek the Lord. We constantly pray and read, worship and serve without fail. Knowledge is given to us. We know God more deeply. We grow closer to God more intimately.

⁹ Romans 10:8.

¹⁰ Cf. Jeremiah 31:33-34.

{SLIDE 10} We go back to what we said at the beginning: how Paul had concern for his fellow Jews. He saw the errors of their ways, when it came to dealing with God. Paul committed the same errors, and thank goodness Jesus got a hold of him. Jesus turned his life around. Paul didn't want anyone to repeat the same errors he made.

Paul had concern for his people and for the new Christians in Rome and for us. Stop committing the errors. Get on board with what God is doing. Simply take a knee and confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. Open your mouth and call on the name of the Lord, and the Lord will be there to save you. For the new Christian this is the beginning of having zeal for God. For the developing Christian, it is the process through which we have zeal for God but we also fill our minds with the true things of God.

Let go of the old life. Let go of any false life we have invented for ourselves. Grasp on to Christ. Hold on to Christ for everything we need. Grow close to Christ, and know his mind, and follow his ways.

Assurance of Pardon:

Hear the Good News from Psalm 103: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of the benefits of the One who pardons all your guilt, and heals all your sufferings, who redeems your life from the grave and surrounds you with steadfast love and tender affection." God fully blesses us. We may trust Jesus' mercy and patience. We receive life from the Holy Spirit, and are made new. Brothers and sisters, believe and accept forgiveness from God! Amen.