

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Romans 10:1-17
“What Good Is A Preacher”

January 22, 2017
(3rd Sunday After Epiphany)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill
Main Street UMC
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646
Church Office: 864-229-7551

“Following Christ From City Center!”

VIB1,2 ROMANS 10:1-17 (RSV*)
 "WHAT GOOD IS A PREACHER?"

B. 10:1-11:12 PAUL'S DESIRE FOR HIS DIVIDED PEOPLE, PART II.

//9:1-2, brethren/heart's desire and prayer

1) vv.1-2 Thesis, Direct Address, That Israel Be Saved, Dual Statement.

- 10:1 + Brethren, New Unit, Direct Address, //9:1-2, Paul Intercedes
 my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be **saved**. p.v. //v.27, 1:16, *desire and prayer*: Intensification
- 2 - I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, D.A.+Thesis+Qualification, *saved* (10:1, 9, 10b, 13), Gal. 1:1-3, Phil. 3:5
 but it is not according to recognition. Hard Diagnosis, Reason For Anguish (9:1-2), Miss The Gift Of Free Righteousness

2) vv.3-17 Elaboration And Explanation In Two Parts, On What It Means To Be Saved.

vv.3-12 = a-b//a'-b' Pattern

a) vv.3-13 First Grounding/For: Saved By Trust, Not Works Of Obedience To The Law.

- 3 1a For, being ignorant of the righteousness Phil. 3:9, A Relational Term = Right Relationship, 4 Parts (a-b//a'-b')
 b that comes from God, = *Christ, Saved Is Not A Thing, Not A Possession, But A Dynamic Relationship*
 b' and seeking to establish their own, //3:8-9, Issue = Independence/Moral Performance/Zeal = Pride
 a' they did not submit to God's righteousness. //9:32, Not Understand, God's Way Of Being Rightly Related
- 4 2 For the goal of the law is Christ, Universal, Jesus Exceeds The Law Which Is Diagnostic, Not Therapeutic
 that every one who has faith (trust) may be justified. 1:16, 4:3, 22, Universal, Right Relationship By Reliance
 The *Doing* Form Of Righteousness Is Unattainable
- 5 1' (For) Moses writes 2 Personified Speeches (v.5, vv.6-7), Within The Old Regime, Contrast Highlighted
 that "the man who does these things shall live by them (it)." Lev. 18:6 (Free rendering), 2:13, Strict Path! Gal. 3:12
- 6a 2'a But (*de*) the Righteousness based on Faith (*pistis*) says, a-b//a-b' → a-b//b'-a', Say (*lips*) in your heart
 b "Do not say in your heart, Dt. 8:17, 9:4, 30:12, 9:2, 10:1, say (confess), heart, Quote + Christology
 c 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (That is, to bring Christ down) or Dt. 30:12, 8:3-4, Gal. 4:4, Work 1
 7 'Who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." Dt. 20:13, Ps. 107:26, Work 2
 v.7//Wisdom, Sir. 24:3, Bar. 2:29-31, 36-37
- 8 Q b. But (*alla*) what does it say? Right Path Is Near At Hand, Already Done, Preached, Personified (*it*)
 A "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the *word* of faith which we preach);/ *rhema*, Not Far Away
 9 because, if you (sg.) confess with your lips that "Jesus is LORD" 2 Confessions, 1 Cor. 12:3, Phil 2:11
 and believe in your (sg.) heart that "God raised him from the dead," 2 Sides To 1 Faith
 you (sg.) will be **saved**." Future, Our Trust Of Faith Includes Confessional Content
lips/heart/heart/lips
- 10a b' For man believes with his heart/ Not Two Things But One From Two Perspectives
 and so is justified, Order Reversed In v.10:heart/lips
 b and (*de*) he confesses with his lips/ //Ps. 71:15
 and so is **saved**. Present, New Relationship With God, Benefits Now/Later, Justified//Saved
 Law First (Dt.), Now Prophets (Is./Joel), (1:2, 3:21), *No one/all/all/everyone*
- 11 a'1 The scripture says, "All who believe in him will not be put to shame." 9:33b, Is. 28:16, Future Tenses
 12 2 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; //1:16, 3:22-23, 9
 2' the same LORD is LORD of all and bestows his riches upon all who *call* upon him. Phil. 2:7-8
- 13 1' For, "all who *call* upon the name of the LORD will be saved." Joel 2:32, Ps. Sol. 6:1, Acts 2:21, Future
all (4x), *call* as bridge to v.14

		b) vv.14-17 Second Grounding/But: How Saved? By The Preaching Of Christ.		Total Process
		4 Question Word Chain = <i>sorites/gradatio/klimax</i> (vv.14-15a) → Short Chain (v.17) //5:3-4, 8:29-30		
14a	1	But how are men to <i>call</i> upon him		Starts At The End, <i>Believe/Hear</i> (v.14b, 16b, 17)
		in whom they have not believed?	Q1	Cannot! Call/Believe
b		And how are they to <u>believe (faith)</u> one		God Provides Spokesman, Failure To Hear
		of whom they have never <u>heard</u> ?	Q2	Cannot! Believe/Heard
c		And how are they to hear		Hear/Preacher Hear/Preacher Hear/Preacher
		without a preacher?	Q3	Cannot! God Delights To Work Through Agents
15a		And how can men preach		Send → Preach → Hear → Believe → Call
		unless they are sent?	Q4	<i>apostello</i> , Climax, Preach/Sent
				Cannot! //2 Cor. 5:20, 1 Thess. 2:13
b	2	As it is written,		God Has Sent Messengers To His People, Paul + Others
c		"How beautiful (timely) are the feet of those who preach good news!"		Is. 52:7 , Plural (Paul)
				God's Part Is Done Faithfully
16a	2'	But (<i>alla ou</i>) they have not <i>all</i> obeyed (heard) the gospel; for Isaiah says,		Then & Now = Not Obey
b		"LORD, who has <u>believed</u> what he has <u>heard</u> from us?"		Only Some! Is. 53:1
			Q5	Play On Word <i>Heard</i> , Error As Disobedience
17a	l'a	So <u>faith</u> (believing)		<i>ara</i> , v.17a Builds On v.16b, Shorter Word Chain, Faith/Believe, Heard, Preacher/Preaching
	b	comes from what is <u>heard</u> ,		Ancient Oral Culture
b	a'	and what is heard		
	b'	comes by the preaching (word, <i>rhema</i>) of Christ.		Christ Own Word In Us! Climax, Christ/Preacher//Heard/Faith

A Brief Treatment Of IVB1-2 Romans 10:1-17

Here begins the second of the three parallel panels (B. 10:1-11:12) The links between the theses of A1. 9:1-2// B1. 10:1-2 include *brethren* (9:3//10:1), *heart* (9:2//10:1b), and the use of dual expressions (*great sorrow and unceasing anguish* [9:2]// *heart's desire and prayer* [10:1b]) in the first person. The theme is Paul's deep concern over his fellow Jews that they may be *saved* (10:1b, 9b, 10b, 13), meaning reclaimed by God in Christ now and later. In 9:1-3 he invokes an oath (v.1-2) and a curse (v.3), in 10:1-2 a prayer (v.1) and a qualification (v.2). The opening direct address, *Brethren*, adds immediacy. His prayer arises from his *heart's desire* that fellow Jews *be saved*. This hope is followed by the sharp qualification that fellow Jews have much zeal for God— itself a good— but that it is not in *recognition* of the new reality, which is the coming of the Messiah in Jesus. Religious sincerity and intensity are no guarantee of truth, as with Paul himself (Gal. 1:1-4, Phil. 3:5, Acts 22:3). In Christian piety, devotion is grounded in divine revelation, preeminently in Jesus. Religious fanaticism— Jewish, Islamic, Christian— is not a credit.

The Elaboration falls into two paragraphs (a. vv.3-13, b. vv.14-17). The first answers the implicit question, “How are people saved?” with the answer, “They are saved not by keeping the law but by trust in Christ, as evidenced in heart level conviction and verbal confession of the risen Jesus as Lord.” The second answers the same with, “by the preaching of Christ.” In witness people hear the good news of who Jesus is and what he's done. Faith is the gift of spiritual sight that *recognizes* Jesus as the promised Jewish Messiah who opens the people of God to Gentiles as well. Preachers are sent to tell so hearers may *call upon the Lord and be saved*. But not all respond; some resist the claims and miss the insight.

The first unit of Elaboration (a. vv.3-13) has a 4 part step pattern (1. v.3, 2. v.4 // 1' v.5, 2' vv.6-13), with the final part (2' vv.6-13) much longer. Paul's critique of v.2 is grounded (*For, Gk. gar*) in v.3; the reason is they are *ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God* (in Christ) and instead think strict obedience to Torah establishes them rightly with God. But if the corrupting power of sin is acknowledged, the law cannot be kept by persons so compromised, no matter the zeal. It's an illusion. If I'm already right with God by ethnicity and ethics, why acknowledge Jesus? The analysis of v.3 is then supported (*For, Gk. gar*) in v.4 with the claim that *Christ is the goal of the law*, so don't stop at the signpost. And now, with *trust/faith* in him as the new currency, all are welcomed through the same door. The law diagnoses; it reveals disability; it does not heal and cannot be the basis for a Jewish righteousness of *their own*.

The second assertion (1' v.5)— and here we hear the voice of Moses (Lev. 18:5)— is that *the one who practices the law must live by it*; i.e. it must keep it entire and without fault, an impossible task. But if the new form of *righteousness based on trust* is given a voice (v.6), its message is that one does not have to go high to bring the Messiah down from heaven by human effort or go low to bring him up from the dead by human effort, since both have already occurred by God's efforts! The work is God's, who has fully vindicated his servant Jesus. The Risen One is now as near as heart and lips, and when you see him for who he is, your heart says *Yes!* and your lips say *Lord!* Jesus reclaims each one from the center and must show himself in order to be recognized; the work of the Spirit is to give inward sight. A new conversation begins when we *call on the name of the Lord*, and at the end we will not be condemned or ashamed; to this secure future Isaiah (v.11) and Joel (v.13) bear witness. The structure of 2' vv.6-13 is a 4:2 concentric pattern with *lips-heart* (b. vv.8-9) // *heart-lips* (b' v.10) and *saved* (v.9b//v.10b) at the center. The frames (a. vv.6-7//a' vv.11-13) personify the new righteousness and Scripture as speaking from the law (vv.6-7) and the prophets (vv.11-13). The word *all* is used four times in vv.11-13 to strike a universal note.

The second unit of the Elaboration (b. vv.14-17) is concentric (1-2//2'-1') with a four question word chain at the beginning (1. vv.14-15) and a two part word chain at the end (1' v.17); the words *faith* and *heard* (v.14//v.17) serve as inclusions. At the double center are two contrasting Isaiah quotes, each with an introduction, “As it is written...,” “for Isaiah says...” That the feet of messengers are counted beautiful because of the great news they bear does not mean all receive it. Some say No to their hurt.

WHAT GOOD IS A PREACHER?

“And how are they to hear without a preacher?”

God normally works through ambassadors.

R O M A N S 1 0 : 1 4 c

Jay Leno was famous for his *man-on-the-street* interviews, and in one he asks passers by to name one of the Ten Commandments. The most common response was not on the original tablets; it was, "God helps those who help themselves." That proverb, which is often used to emphasize a get-your-act-together approach to salvation, is often attributed to the Bible, but it's more closely tied to other sources. In an old Greek fable, a wagon falls into a ravine, and when the driver appeals to the god Hercules for help, he's told to get to work himself. In one of Aesop's fables, a man calls on the goddess Athena for help during a shipwreck; she tells him to start swimming!

A French author from the 1600s said, "Help yourself, and Heaven will help you too." That's close, but it was an Englishman of the same century, Algernon Sidney, who's credited with the now familiar wording, "God helps those who help themselves." And when Benjamin Franklin used it in his *Poor Richard's Almanac* of 1736, it came into the stream of American folk wisdom. Interestingly enough, similar instruction is found in the Quran, "Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves."¹ God will aid you, it teaches, if only you take initiative. And in whatever form, story or pithy proverb, it's a call to action, and effective not only as a promise of divine aid, but as a warning that aid is withheld as long as you are frozen, "God does not help those who do not first help themselves." But is it true, not just as aid to action but as a teaching about God?

¹ Sura 13:11. See the article, "God helps those who help themselves," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_helps_those_who_help_themselves.

Romans 10:1-17..... 6

The proverb never appears in Scripture, and the way it's often used, as a self-help approach to salvation, that somehow God is waiting for us to make the first move before offering aid, is the exact opposite of the Bible's message of salvation by God's kindness and grace, that God is at work in our direction long before we ever respond.² God helps those who cannot help themselves, and when it comes to having a healed relationship with God, that's all of us. We have nothing to commend ourselves but raw need, mired as we are in sin and marked as we are for death, bludgeoned by the devil, morally misguided, self-deceived and full of zeal for prideful schemes to save ourselves and demonstrate our character to the Almighty as if it merited special treatment.

I was surprised recently to read how confident some are in this matter. During an interview before his 50th college reunion, former New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg confessed that his mortality has started to dawn on him at age 72. He's been sobered at how many of his classmates have passed. The author of the interview concluded with this observation:

"But if Bloomberg senses he may not have as much time left as he'd like, he has little doubt about what awaits him at Judgment Day. Pointing to his work on gun safety, obesity and smoking cessation, he said with a grin: 'I am telling you, if there is a God, when I get to heaven I'm not stopping to be interviewed. I'm heading straight in. I've earned my place... It's not even close.'"³

I don't think so, Mr. Mayor. Just another example of self-deception and pride, an amazing lack of awareness of how the Lord your God sees you, one of his own his Jewish tribe, and with the same issue as so many of your forebears in the faith, and even many Christians as well.

No one earns their way; no one is in a position to obligate God with their

² This is the much loved Methodist teaching of *prevenient grace*, the idea that God's prior engagement enables our responsiveness.

³ Jeremy W. Peters, "Bloomberg Plans a \$50 Million Challenge to the N.R.A." *The New York Times* (4-15-14).

moral resume and good words; no one is pure enough, no not one. Sins are not balanced out with good deeds as if the latter cancelled the former in some magical accounting system. Evil thoughts are inward and bad behaviors outward symptoms of a deeper malady, that we are alienated from our Maker, severed from divine life, that we have gone the way of independence, that we live in a far country, that no amount of religious zeal or heroic sacrifice can bring us what we most need, which is to be forgiven and given the gift of a healed relationship with the One who made us. Bad men know this; men who are good by current cultural standards may have a harder time, particularly successful ones like Bloomberg who are used to winning and apply that same strategy to the life to come, if there is one, if there is a God to be impressed.

And this is where the classic Christian message is perhaps at its most offensive; that it utterly denies our ability and capacity to make an independent contribution to this thing called *salvation*,⁴ which is the very large biblical vision of us being rescued and healed and kept by God in this life and in the life to come in two stages, first heaven after death, and then— at the end of the age—the gift of new resurrection bodies fitted for the amazing new world of God’s kingdom, which is this creation more than fully restored.⁵

Pride is a stinking lie. Human worth and the dignity that goes with it are gifts because of the One in whose image we are stamped, but pride is a dark thing, an ugly slithering in the inward shadows, an impulse from below to live in a circle of one and not to bow the knee or heart to any, especially the One who has a right to both. And when it rises within heart and mind to swell the soul, it is a deadly inflation, a personal repudiation of the God who made us and calls for our first and central loyalty, which is, “No other gods before me.”⁶

⁴ See Charles H. Talbert, Jason A. Whitlark, *Getting ‘Saved’: The Whole Story of Salvation in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

⁵ On two stage post-mortem existence (i.e. heaven + the kingdom of God) see N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2008).

⁶ Ex. 20:3.

Romans 10:1-17..... 8

I'm not sure when I first heard the stirring lines of William Ernest Henley's late 19th century poem *Invictus*. Perhaps it was read to me by my father because it had so stirred him as a youth of about my age. And for a young man full of heroic hopes and romantic visions— as I then was, it's pure intoxication, particularly its concluding couplet:

“Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be,
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance,
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance,
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll.

A reference to Jesus' words⁷
The final judgment⁸

*I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.*⁹

Independent to the very end!

Brave words. Foolish words, underscored by the fact that the man who wrote them took his own life in utter despair. All the way to last line, pride-masquerading-as-bravery builds to the final lie, “I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul.”

⁷ Matthew 7:14.

⁸ Revelation 5:16.

⁹ www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/invictus.

Romans 10:1-17. 9

No, the Bible howls back in reproach. You do not possess your soul; it's not a ship you own and sail. It was crafted and outfitted by another; it's owned, and a recall is pending. You were not meant to be self-ruled, self-propelled. You were meant to be ruled by the only one who knows you in such a way as to call forth the best that is in you, and that is King Jesus, Jewish Messiah Jesus, the one who opens for us a way back into a right relationship with his Father and the Holy Spirit. He's the Antidote for sin's poison, the Victor who frees us from Satan's cruelties, the Teacher who leads us into truth, the Physician with power to heal and finally grant us resurrection bodies like his own, a Leader worth following, the Captain of our ship and the North Star of our souls, and before him all will stand, as the Book and Creed affirm, "And he will come again to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom shall have no end."¹⁰ And then we will know the answer to the question, "Did you trust me? Am I your hope?" And why this? Because if the trust is there, the relationship changes us from the inside so that new attitudes and actions flow like fresh water from a deep spring. I cannot change me, but a living Jesus can, in areas and at a pace he determines.

There is no one like him, the church says to all. He's one of a kind, and the one thing most likely to keep you away from his transforming friendship is not wickedness or foolishness but pride, the death of which is to say, "I was wrong. I need the One God offers. I need to know and follow Jesus Christ, not alone, but in the company of his other friends." And with that door unlocked, you are right to expect further aid and help, as Paul promises in verse 12, "... the same Lord is Lord of all *and bestows his riches* on all who call upon him."

TURNING TO THE TEXT

The reason I've set the stage is to show what Paul is against, and why he mounts such an argument for the benefit of his fellow Jews for whom his heart aches. Hear the depth of yearning in verse 10, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved."

So why, Paul? Why so few? And why such resistance? And his answer,

¹⁰ The Nicene Creed, *U.M Hymnal*: 880.

Romans 10:1-17..... 10

true as he saw it, is hard to read in a post-Holocaust world because it is such a piercing indictment of a Jewish error which soon became a Christian one as well. “I bear them witness,” he pledges, “that they have a *zeal for God*, but it is not according to recognition,”¹¹ or as other translations say, “not according to knowledge.”¹² They don’t yet see it. And not seeing it, they don’t get it.

Devotion is necessary, and if faith in God does not carry deep emotional loyalty and expression, then something’s gone shallow and thin. But zeal is not enough, and one of the problem we have in the West these days, and in the churches in the West, is that our devotion is lacking, as in a marriage that’s lost it’s romance for something less demanding and more manageable. The humm of boredom, whether between a man and his wife or the soul and God is evidence something alive is missing. Our vision is dimming.

But holy passion for God is not enough. What Paul called *zeal* is not enough; it must have a right understanding of it’s object, in this case God. And what many of Paul’s fellow Jews missed in his day, what they did not see and recognize and know and still miss in ours— partly because of the way they’ve been mistreated by us— is who Jesus is, who their most famous brother is. And the reason they miss him is a case Paul explores in verse 3 where he indicts them for pride, though the does not use the word. And remember, he is one of them and his own life a perfect example of what he indicts in them.

As a zealous young scholar, Paul was a Sanhedrin hit man on the first Christians, an official persecutor of the church, because he and others sincerely believed the whole Jesus thing was a dangerous lie, a corrupting virus that could not be allowed to spread. But then, as we read in Acts 9, on the way to arrest Jewish believers in Damascus he was suddenly arrested by the risen Jesus, and in that moment his world turned upside down. Fresh religious experience with an undeniably alive Jesus scrambled everything. He was so wrong; he now had to rethink everything around a new personal center, around the one who asked

¹¹ On this translation, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2001), 169.

¹² e.g. RSV.

Romans 10:1-17..... 11

him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” to which he answered, “Who are you, Lord?” The Book of Romans is largely his answer to the second question.

God’s new people were given a great gift at Mount Sinai, the law as summarized in Ten Commandments. This is how you live with the God Yahweh who just rescued you from Pharaoh’s hatred and control. Living free means living with God and his understanding of love and justice. God saved them by powerful divine action, and now the family handbook is issued in two stone tablets. They now have to learn a whole new way to live; you don’t get over four hundred years of slavery in a week. They now know God, and here are the boundaries: you shall, and you shall not. This is how life works best for a bunch of ex-slaves hemmed up in a vast wilderness with a strange new God of holy love. They have to get adjusted to his ways, not him to theirs.

But here is what the internal sin of pride does. You separate the law from the primary relationship you received as a pure gift and think to yourself, “If I do what Yahweh says, if I keep the law in detail, then I’m right with God on the basis of my obedience.” No, and it’s wrong for two reasons. The relationship preceded the commands.¹³ God said, “I’ve saved you, now learn to live a new way.” God did not say, “If you obey me, then we will have a relationship.” God did not say, “I only help those who first help themselves.” Get the order right! First grace, then living out its implications; first the gift of a saving relationship, then living into what it means with clear general guidelines.

The second reason such thinking is wrong is that it’s naive; it does not understand how inwardly corrupt we are. They are now free of the chains of Egypt; they are not free of the inward deceptions of sin, of which pride is first. “Now that we have the law, we have a way to set up an accounting system that puts credits in our column, and with credits come bargaining power.” No! Many of Paul’s kinsmen missed Jesus because, “... being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, *and seeking to establish their own*, they did not submit to God’s righteousness.” They took the law as an end in itself, as an independent means to secure themselves, and that habit of mind and custom

¹³ Ex. 20:1-2.

blinded many to Jesus the Messiah.

The purpose of God’s law is not to give us a system of moral accounting; it shows us what’s wrong with us; it’s diagnostic, not therapeutic. It names the disease, but it is not the medicine that cures. The law points beyond itself to a broken relationship with God, and when the one who saved them from Egypt showed up in Jesus, many missed what God was up to. There was no recognition. Loads of emotional zeal and devotion, but little understanding. They didn’t see him for who he was. Jesus was sent as a fresh gift, a revealed doorway into the heart of their God. But if I check all the boxes, then I’m already right with God. Why do I need him? And the odd thing, no the sad thing, about this form of thinking is that many Christians have it as well. They don’t understand how deep the roots of sin are, and that if they are just nice and decent and respectable, then all is OK, but all is not OK. We need Jesus Christ; we need a transforming new friendship; we need one who is not satisfied with externals but goes to the very core to set up a new regime and clear the clutter.

So, having given us a perspective on his people who are much like he was in his pre-conversion days, Paul turns to the new way of being right with God, not by keeping the law, which none can do because we are so compromised, but in simple trust in what God is doing for us in Jesus the Son, the Sent One, the One who came down at Christmas and came back from a death on Easter.

What God is after, and what God always enables, is trust, another word for which is faith. Do I see Jesus as worthy of my trust? What do his four biographies reveal? What do others say about him? What is their testimony? Do I feel drawn towards him? Will I take the risk of surrender? Will I fly the white flag, and how will he treat me as a POW? That is the saving question, not “What can I do to make myself right with this God and enter into negotiation for favorable terms?” And if you come to Jesus, you come empty handed, and that is where stinking, devilish pride raises its last and most ferocious defense, a great mental battle that is the battle for your soul; you are the disputed territory! The Living Jesus offers a new life, and what you bring is not a counter offer but the entire mess, just as it is, just as you are now with no schemes of self-improvement or grand promises to do better next time. And if you prefer the pride of self-determination to his offer, the consequences are all yours.

In his book *Generation Ex-Christian*, which is about younger Christians leaving the faith, Drew Dyck relates an interview with a young man who left Christianity to join the Wicca religion:

“Morninghawk Apollo— who renamed himself as is common in Wiccan practice— discussed his rejection of Christianity with candor. ‘Ultimately why I left is that the Christian God demands that you submit to his will. In Wicca, it's just the other way around. Your will is paramount. We believe in gods and goddesses, but the deities we choose to serve are based on our wills.’”¹⁴

There you have it. That is the appeal of the devil’s ancient pride all dressed up for a new day in a hip new form of nature worship. I get to be my own little deity and call on the forces of darkness for support, and that the fake gods and goddesses will do, the demons distorting and consuming more and more of me till what remains is fit only for the garbage dump of the universe, what the Bible terms hell.¹⁵ After all, what is God to do with creatures who once had the glorious opportunity to be fully human and turned away because autonomy mattered more than the call of divine love? And every day this drama is being played out again and again with real consequences.

But there is an alternative path. And if we follow the careful logic of Paul’s presentation in verses 6 through 13, what he’s claiming is that God does all the heavy lifting. It’s not as if we need to expend great effort to ascend to heaven to bring the Messiah down. It’s already happened. Christmas is long past. He showed up in Bethlehem long ago. Nor do we go on some visionary journey to the realms of death to bring him back. It’s already happened. Easter’s done, and God is the graverobber. He showed up again in Jerusalem and Galilee. A living, breathing Jesus is not far away; he’s very near, and he’s

¹⁴ Drew Dyck, "The Leavers," *Christianity Today* (November, 2010), 43.

¹⁵ In *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis writes, “To enter heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being in earth; to enter hell, is to be banished from humanity. What is cast (or casts itself) into hell is not a man: it is ‘remains’” (religionnews.com/014/03/12/5-c-s-lewis-quotes-surprising-shocking).

Romans 10:1-17..... 14

making a case to your heart and your head. You are under siege, as is every human being all the time. And if you catch a glimpse of who he is because the Spirit illumined you in a flash, it's an invitation to do two simple things: 1) Recognize that he's not a dead figure of the past but in fact very much alive after having been crucified, because how else would he be speaking to you so clearly? And 2) To say what this means, and that is the confession "Jesus is Lord," which is an Old Testament title for God.

He's alive, and the way he saves me now and later is by ruling over me. A simple Yes will do just fine, "Yes, Lord. I entrust myself to you because you're worthy." Thus begins a new, powerful saving relationship with him at work within because you surrendered the keys of your castle. He did not batter down the gates but he kept on knocking. It's for Jews, it's for Gentiles, and it will carry you all the way through to the end, as Paul quotes from Isaiah, "All who believe in him will not be put to shame."¹⁶ No fear of condemnation.

And once the Yes is said, then the vast reconstruction process begins, but on his terms and at his timing. It's never self-help but trusting cooperation. And the goal is simple. The God who made you and came for you is after one thing above all, that you return his great love with your entire being- heart, soul, mind, and strength- and that out of the security of that relationship you learn to see others through his eyes and love them too.

This is how life changes. This is what it means to be caught in the currents of salvation; this is what it looks like to follow Jesus as a disciple. So if someone asks, "Pastor Phil, are you saved?" my answer has three parts: 1) I was saved long ago in Jesus' death and resurrection; that is the past foundation for anything that follows. 2) I am being saved now in a transforming relationship; that is the present process. And 3) I will be a saved soul at death and be fully and gloriously saved only at the end when I get a new, slick, amazing resurrection body just like Jesus and made just for me, and those are the future dimensions. I was saved. I am being saved. I shall be fully saved, and along the way there have been some memorable encounters: baptism,

¹⁶ Romans 8:1 ff.

Romans 10:1-17..... 15

conversion, filling with the Spirit, divine appointments, stages of maturity and fresh surrenders to new agendas. Markers aplenty, but underneath it all a steady process of being led and supplied and molded and encouraged.

So how does God get the word out? Occasionally angels preach, particularly to get things started as with the angels to the shepherds at Jesus birth, but after that it's normally much less showy. God uses all his children to embody the message, and some he calls as official public voices. They serve as preachers, as pastors, as missionaries and good news tellers. They communicate wherever doors are open. Many hear, and some respond when the light shines. They say Yes to Jesus by calling on him as if he was standing before them, which he is. They hear the voice of Christ coming through the witness as the Holy Spirit turns human words into divine arrows to pierce the heart. And to those who say Yes, they thank God for the beautiful feet that brought the message to where they were: a Sunday School class, a backyard Bible study, a youth retreat, a hospital visit, a conversation at a coffee shop, and Yes, sometimes even from a pulpit on a Sunday like today.

CONCLUSION

Earlier I told the story of Mayor Bloomberg, a Jew by history if not by practice, who embodied the old error of trying to earn his way by independent means. And I hope you see how foolish that is, in its Jewish and Christian versions. The standards are just too high, and we are just too fallen and disabled. So to end I tell you another Jewish story, the story of popular novelist Andrew Klavan who was raised in a non-practicing home. For 45 years he lived, to quote his words, "as a philosophical agnostic and a practical atheist." But let's hear him give his own testimony of the steps that eventually led him to faith in Christ:

“Jesus never appeared to me while I lay drunk in the gutter. And yet, looking back on my life, I see that Christ was beckoning to me at every turn. When I was a child, he was there in the kindness of a Christian babysitter and the magic of a Christmas Eve spent at her house. When I was a troubled young man contemplating suicide, he

was in the voice of a Christian baseball player who gave a radio interview that inspired me to go on. And always, he was in the day-to-day miracle of my marriage, a lifelong romance that taught me the reality of love and slowly led me to contemplate the greater love that was its source and inspiration.

But perhaps most important for a novelist who insisted that ideas should make sense, Christ came to me in stories. Slowly, I came to understand that his life, words, sacrifice, and resurrection formed the hidden logic behind every novel, movie, or play that touched my deepest mind.

I was reading a story when that logic finally kicked in. I was in my forties, lying in bed with one of Patrick O'Brian's great seafaring adventure novels. One of the characters I admired said a prayer before going to sleep, and I thought, 'Well, if he can pray, so can I.' I laid the book aside and whispered a three-word prayer in gratitude for the contentment I'd found, and for the work and people I loved: 'Thank you, God.'

It was a small, even prideful prayer: a self-impressed intellectual's hesitant experiment with faith. God's response was an act of extravagant grace. I woke the next morning and everything had changed. There was a sudden clarity and brightness to familiar faces and objects; they were alive with meaning and with my own delight in them. I called this 'the joy of my joy,' and it came to me again whenever I prayed. Naturally I began to pray every day."

Klavan was later baptized and wrote a book titled *The Great Good Thing: A Secular Jew Comes to Faith in Christ*.¹⁷

So what good are preachers? No good at all, unless they keep telling the Jesus story, and then they are very important. Please don't miss the opportunity. Turn from pride to Jesus Christ. He thinks you're worth the risk.

¹⁷ Andrew Klavan, "How a Man of the Coasts and Cities Found Christ," *Christianity Today* (8-22-16), www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/september/how-man-of-coasts-and-cities-found-christ.
