

Beautiful Feet
Romans 10:14-17

We've taken a couple weeks off from our study of the book of Romans, so let me remind you where we are. My last sermon was entitled the simple gospel, and that title gives you a good description of this chapter. The gospel is simple, the good news is clear. The way of salvation is plain. You don't have to go up to heaven in order to understand it, or descend into the earth, as we read in verses 6-7. Instead, it is right here. The gospel is right here, easy to grasp.

Rom. 10:8. "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved...13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

A lot can be said by way of explanation of all that, but the main point is simple, direct. "Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." And that means, according to verse 9, to "confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead." Salvation comes to those willing to declare what they believe about Jesus. And it is that subject which we pick up this morning, what Paul means when he writes about,

I. CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD FOR SALVATION.

"Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." But Paul, then asks a question, in order to make his next point. That is such a consistent example of his teaching method, asking and then answering the questions that arise. And he is a good and wise teacher, understanding the minds of those who hear him, so he knows what those questions are. And verse 14 begins with

familiar words, "How then..."

In other words, what's next? "Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved," but what does that mean? And how does that come about? What is involved? What is necessary to "call on the name of the Lord?" Paul begins the answer to that question by emphasizing,

A. The need to believe.

v.14 "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?"

It does matter what you believe. The focus of that is, of course, the resurrection. Verse 9, you "believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead." That climactic point at which the triumph and victory of Jesus was made clear rises to the forefront of gospel faith, what you must believe. The resurrection, as the representative act of everything Jesus did, is the point at which his saving work was undeniably proclaimed. Thus we,

Rom. 4:24 "...believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification."

And this is the gospel, as summarized in,

1 Cor. 15:3 "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve."

So you must believe, if you are going to call on the name of the Lord to be saved. It's not simply some sort of emotional reaction or response. It's not simply a feeling, but a commitment of the mind, a commitment to believe. You must know something.

Notice, I have stressed the simplicity of that knowledge, because I fear sometimes we make it too complex. Especially we who understand the truths of what we often call the reformed faith. There is benefit in growing in knowledge and understanding, but I don't want to draw the line too narrowly when it comes to the work of salvation through believing in the gospel. There must be a primary focus on that which is essential. A hundred years ago the word used for that was the identification of fundamentals, the fundamentals of the faith, which is where the label fundamentalism first came from. It means you have to believe certain things about Jesus in order to call upon him for salvation.

And yet, those fundamentals are themselves rather simple. You believe in Jesus, the eternal son of God, born of a virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit, raised from the dead on the third day. Much of those fundamentals can be summarized in the phrases of the Apostles' Creed.

But notice what Paul says next. In order to believe, you first have to hear.

B. The need to hear.

v.14 "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?"

Here is the clear foundation for what we simply call evangelism. This is the simple answer to the question, "why evangelize?" If we believe in election, as Paul has been emphasizing in chapter 9, if we believe in predestination as is so clearly taught in Ephesians 1, then some people get confused about the need to evangelize. They think that the need to evangelize is removed by the believe in election, and many

Christians, for that reason, reject the doctrine of election. Some people go to the other extreme, and intentional neglect the work of evangelism because it is God who calls, God who saves.

And he does. God does save the lost. It is his work. And he does call us to himself, salvation itself is labelled a calling, an effectual calling to use the language of our catechisms. That's God's work. But that doesn't stop Paul from emphasizing that in order to believe, a person first has to hear! So why evangelize? Why proclaim the gospel? Why witness to the gospel? Simple, because faith comes by hearing, according to verse 17. "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?"

I hope you are able to understand and believe in the doctrine of election and predestination. I am eager to teach those things, because the Bible does so, and they are foundational to a proper understand of God and his power to save. But don't ever think that those things should keep you from witnessing to the gospel. Unbelievers need to believe. And in order to believe, they need to hear! That's the means that God uses.

Then notice what's next in,
v.14 "And how shall they hear without a preacher?"

So we see,

C. The need for a preacher.

Not long after I was ordained, while still very young, I began to pastor a church that was steeped in a lot of tradition. It was an older congregation and they had many habits and traditions that they were simply never going to give up. And one of them was to call their pastor "Preacher." That was my name to them, not just a title. That's who I was. At first, I didn't really like it. Being younger than almost all of them, I generally used my first name to identify myself, and I had always been glad for the people I

pastored to use my first name. Actually, I still am. Over the years, in other churches I've pastored, I have often been called by my title and last name, as I often am here, "Pastor Willet." But only in that one place was I called preacher, again, not even as a title but the whole of my name. Just preacher.

I did come to appreciate that as time went on, and though I'm not suggesting that here nor certainly not asking to be called that, but that old tradition did emphasize something important. It was especially important to me as a young man whose experience in life was much more limited than almost everyone else in the congregation. God put me in their midst so that they could hear the gospel.

v.14

The word means to proclaim something, to be a herald. And my calling is to proclaim the gospel so that those who listen to me might hear it. And above all else, that is my responsibility as a preacher. And yet there is more. Paul stresses,

D. The need to be sent.

v.15

I believe this refers to the authority given to the proclamation of the gospel through the church. There is an authority that is properly in place when the preaching of the word is done under the delegated authority of Jesus Christ, as the head of the church. Jesus gave the church apostles and prophets, who were the foundation of that church. And through the apostles and prophets, he established the perpetual office of rule in the church--the rule of elders or presbyters. Paul continually urged and directed the churches he planted to ordain elders. And it was through the authority of those ordained elders that the authority of Christ was to be exercised in the church.

And now, with the apostolic age behind us, with all the apostles and prophets having died that first generation after Christ, now, it is the elders of the church who do the sending. The primary act of sending is described by Paul as the laying on of hands by the body of elders, which is literally, in Greek, the Presbytery. In order to prove that point, let me read Paul's exhortations to his young disciple Timothy.

1Tim. 4:11 "These things command and teach. 12 Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. 13 Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. 14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. 15 Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. 16 Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you."

Preaching presupposes sending. And with its most significant meaning, in the most formal and technical sense, preaching can be done only under the authority of the church. Our church takes great pains to carry out that biblical principle. A preacher in the OPC must first pass examinations to be licensed to preach, much like the preliminary examination a doctor faces. No one is permitted to preach regularly without this licensure. And he must pass a period of probation. And a man called to serve as a minister of the word, devoting himself the work of preaching and teaching, must be set apart to that task by the laying on of hands, which we call ordination.

With that ceremony, a man is invested with the authority of being sent, sent by the church, which derives all its authority from the king and head of our church, the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Preaching presupposes sending. So let's look more closely at,

II. THE WORK OF THE PREACHER.

Paul quotes Isaiah 52.

v.15 “And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!”

There is a slight difference of words in the New American Standard Bible and other translations, omitting the reference to the words “the gospel of peace.” The original Greek texts differ as to whether or not that phrase is actually in Romans 10, but even if it isn’t, the words are part of the quote from Isaiah.

Is. 52:7 “How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good things, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to Zion “Your God reigns!” 8 Your watchmen shall lift up their voices.”

Interesting reference to feet. Beautiful feet. Normally, we wouldn’t think of feet among the more beautiful parts of the body, and they certainly aren’t in my case. But the emphasis is upon the labor involved, the commitment to work. Feet swift to be involved in the work of the gospel,

A. The work of proclamation.

In other words, the work of the preacher is the work of proclaiming the gospel of peace, peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ. The work of the preacher is the work of proclaiming good things. Both times, both phrases in verse 15 the same Greek word is used, and its one word—those who preach the gospel. You wouldn’t be surprised to know that the Greek word comes into English as the word evangelism, a word that refers to both the message of good news as well as to its declaration.

There it is. God’s method of evangelism. Preaching.

Proclamation. Declaring the truth of God. Not the entertainment evangelism of many “Christian” artists today. Not the emotional evangelism of much revivalism and sentimental songs that are so popular. Not even primarily, private reading. Though God does save people in all those ways. Yet preaching should never sink to the level of story-telling. It should never be reduced to a lecture on human thoughts and ideas. The primary, God-ordained method of evangelism is the preaching of the gospel. Preaching peace with God. Preaching good things, which ultimately, without question, refers to the gift of eternal life. It is,

B. The message of good news.

“Glad tidings of good things!”, according to verse 15.

How said, and how indicative of our day and age, that the word “preaching” implies something to be avoided, something bad. It implies self-righteousness, and a judgmental spirit. And it also offends the autonomous and proud spirit of fallen man. We don’t like to hear words spoken with authority, words proclaimed with a sense of meaning and purpose. And that’s sad because what is spoken is such good news. And the good news is this, the God is reconciled. That your sins are forgiven. That the breach of your relationship with God is restored. That the curse is removed, even the curse of death itself.

This is the good news of the gospel, that,

Rom. 5:1 “...having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

This is the good news that is proclaimed by the true and faithful church of Jesus, that God “has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ.” This is the good news, that,

Eph. 2:8 “...by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest

anyone should boast.”

This is the good news, that God,
Micah 7:18 “does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy. 19 He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. [He] will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.”

Ps. 103:10 “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

That’s the message good news that I preach to you, for that is what God has called me to do. Notice, however, that not everyone believes. No surprise to Paul.

v.16

The preaching of the gospel makes outwardly evident that which God has determined in the secret counsel of his own will, namely,

III. THE GREAT DIVIDE.

The ultimate division between all men, the division of everyone into two groups, those who believe that which they hear, and those who don’t. Thus we read that,

A. Many willfully reject the gospel.

That doesn’t surprise Paul, but it does grieve him. There is a sadness to those words in verse 16, “But they have not all obeyed the gospel.” He quotes Isaiah again, the passage so familiar in terms of Jesus the suffering servant, the one who was, indeed rejected.

Is. 53:1 “Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. 3 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.”

Jesus was rejected, even as he offered up his life for our sins. He was despised and rejected by men. And Paul understood that.

1 Cor. 1:18 “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” 20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? 21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, 24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

A stumbling block. Foolishness. To those who either think themselves good enough for God or who refuse to believe that a God even exists, a god who holds them accountable. And they will perish for their unbelief. Nonetheless, we continue to

proclaim the good news of the gospel of peace with God because,

B. Many choose to believe what they hear from the word of God.

v.17

I could give all kinds of examples. I could give my own example, of a young teenager who was lost in his own self-righteousness, thinking, wrongly I had done enough to get to heaven. Then I heard the word of God, and in a moment, in an instant for me, the light went on and I realized that I was a sinner deeply in need of a savior. That moment changed my life. I was 13.

I always enjoy hearing reports from the Gideons, who make it their mission to place Bibles in hotel rooms and schools, so that people can read the word of God for themselves. And every Gideon I have ever heard speak recounts stories of those who heard the word of God directly, by reading it themselves. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Each of you, no doubt, would have the same story, just different details. You heard the word of God. Perhaps for some of you it was from a faithful father reading to you as a child, or a devoted mother teaching you what the Bible said. Perhaps it was a faithful preacher in church, or online. Perhaps it happened for you in an instant, like it did for me. Perhaps it took a long period of time, and only gradually could you say that you believe.

But in every case, in every situation, the bottom line is the same. “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

So I proclaim that word to you even this morning. And I take

note of that great divide, those who reject the gospel and those who believe what they hear. And I urge you to believe. I urge you to believe in Jesus. For,

v.9. “...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Thus my goal before you today is to have beautiful feet, to be one who will preach to you the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things!

John 20:31 “...that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”