

The All-Inclusive Good News

1st Sun. in Lent – 03/06/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Romans 10:8b-13 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 8b [Paul says,] **“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is the word of faith that we proclaim)...”**.

Introduction

⌘ “I don’t believe in God because He is so unattainable; so perfect and so demanding with His commands that there is no way for me to interact with Him; no reasonable chance that I could ever live up to His expectations at all”.

➔ That’s just one of the countless arguments, excuses and/or reasons that people give for why they will not believe in God. Even for the largest chunk of people who do claim to believe in God, He is still thought of as being so far away from us – “up there somewhere” that we can’t really have a close, or intimate relationship with Him.

⌘ And since a growing number of people today are questioning God’s existence, it stands to reason that even more people are now questioning the validity of “the word” from which God’s believers claim to receive His message and His truth.

➔ And then, whenever you or I might try to share that Word from God with others and claim that it is the one and only objective Word of truth that exists, oh, the labels and accusations really start to fly with a flurry even faster today than they did in the past. “That is so discriminatory for you to say there is only one word of truth”. “How mean and hateful for you to say that your God is the true God and that my god is not”. “Why can’t you just be more ‘inclusive’ and just let me believe as I want to believe?”

⌘ Today, as we find ourselves at the beginning of the Lenten season with all of its extra services and its more directed focus upon the message of Christ’s death on the cross, Paul leads us here in his letter to the new Christians in the Rome, to consider that the Word of God actually is *The All-Inclusive Good News* for the souls of this entire world.

➔ Paul teaches us three basic truths regarding the Word of God: 1) The Word is “near you”; 2) The Word is effective and powerful; and 3) The Word is universal.

I. The Nearness of the Word

⌘ Paul begins in verse eight with a simple proclamation, “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart”. This statement comes in the middle of an argument where Paul is trying to refute those who use the excuse that being “right” in God’s eyes is not attainable; that there is “no way I can ever do enough to please God or even understand God so that I can be saved, so what’s the use of even trying?”

➔ And so Paul says it straight out, “that’s just not the case”. Getting to know God and His Word of faith is the exact opposite of any person having to “do something” to search Him out or try to find God somewhere. He’s the one who has done all of the work on our behalf. Paul even includes his own life as proof of that. This is “the word of faith that we proclaim”, Paul says (v.8).

➔ Remember, Paul used to search out Christians to persecute and arrest because they shared the word of faith about Jesus. But Jesus Himself came to Paul on the road to Damascus and literally knocked him to ground with the truth of His saving grace. And now it’s Paul who is happy to go throughout the world as God’s instrument; bringing the word of faith to the Romans in this case; and eventually to you and me all these years later.

- Look, it's not hard to find a Bible with over 5 billion copies having been printed, according to the Guinness Book of World Records. And that's only the written word. Far more many times than that "the word of faith" has been proclaimed and shared and taught by mouth from parents and friends and teachers and pastors and more.
- ⊗ Yes, once that word passes over my tongue, for example and hits your eardrums; or once it is read by your eyes from the printed page or screen, God says that it literally enters inside of you. It resides in us as "the word of faith"; that is the message that is about and creates faith in the one true and triune God. In particular, the object of that faith is God's Son, Jesus Christ.
 - Paul defines this Word in 1 Corinthians 1:23 when he says, "but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."
- ⊗ When Paul says that the Word is "in" our mouths he means that it impacts and guides our conversations so that we too become like Paul; proclaiming and bearing witness to Jesus and His truth.
 - When he says that the Word is "in" our hearts he emphasizes that it defines us deep down into the core of our being; permeating every nook and cranny. This is a word and message that is so much more than just an intellectual message from a textbook or a news article. This involves the heart, so that God works faith inside of us and we learn to trust Him with everything we've got!
- ⊗ One of the ancient church fathers, Ambrose emphasized that our hearts and mouths are so interconnected that they can't be separated. He calls them the "twin trumpets of mouth and heart".
 - Paul says in verse nine, "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." The Greek word that's translated as "confess" is "ὁμολογέω" (homologéō) which means "to say the same things" or "to agree in statement". So when you or I confess that "Jesus is Lord" with our mouths we are saying the same thing that we believe in our hearts; which is the same thing that God has worked inside of us at our Baptism through the Holy Spirit. It is not, nor can it ever be understood as our own word of truth or something that we have willed ourselves into doing or saying without the grace of God.
 - It's God's Word; God's truth; God's gift of faith that He has given to us freely out of His initiative and love.

II. The Effectiveness/Power of the Word

- ⊗ Now we move on to see what Paul has to teach us regarding the effectiveness and the power of this Word of faith. In other words, what is the content that it proclaims and what is the change that it brings about inside of us and for us?
 - We just looked at verse nine where Paul says that the subject matter of this Word is Jesus and what He has done in our place. It tells us that Jesus came to earth in human flesh – making Him simultaneously fully God and fully man, yet without any ounce of sin. As Paul says, this Word works inside of us the conviction that "God raised Him from the dead"; a brutal, torturous death on the cross to pay the penalty for my sin and your sin and the sins of the entire world!
 - Believing Jesus did this for me, and that He conquered that death three days later is the greatest source of power in all of the world, because it saves me from eternal death in hell!

- ✘ In verse 10 Paul speaks directly to God’s power as it works in and through His Word while residing within us. He says, literally from the Greek, “For with the heart a person believes into justification, and with the mouth he confesses into salvation.”
 - ➔ Those verbs, “believes” and “confesses” are both what are called passive verbs in the Greek. That means that the work is being done upon, or for the person, not by the person on his own accord. So again, when the Word resides inside of us, God is the one who uses that Word – His Word, to cleanse us and proclaim us innocent of the guilt of our sin, and to bring us into His gift of eternal salvation before His glorious throne!
- ✘ And back in verse nine, we hear how this powerful Word works to make it so that our mouths are able to confess that “Jesus is Lord”. Those three words made up one of the very first ever Christian creeds. A short, yet powerful proclamation at the time of Paul that would instantly set a person apart in a Roman world that believed there were many gods and many lords.
 - ➔ No, the truth that alone grants forgiveness and salvation and eternal life is the truth that “Jesus is Lord”, not Caesar, not Zeus or some other Greek god; not mother nature, or my favorite Rock Star, or your sports hero, and certainly not that deceptive trinity – me, myself and I!
 - ➔ Proclaiming and believing what the Word teaches, that “Jesus is Lord” is what saves souls in this life and the next! That’s it.

III. The Universality of the Word

- ✘ And that brings us to the third and final point in Paul’s teaching before us today. This truth, who is it for? Just for the Jews? Or the Romans to whom Paul wrote this letter?
 - ➔ No, in verse 11 he says, “For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in [Jesus] will not be put to shame’.” This Good News about Jesus – even though many people have tried to say that it is far too exclusive and limited when it has Jesus saying about Himself in John 14:6, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” – this Good News – it is the most inclusive Word of all!
 - ➔ And Paul emphasizes that when He says that in God’s eyes, there is no distinction regarding a person’s nationality or any other category by which people try to create divisions; not when it comes to a person’s relationship with the Lord God.
- ✘ Verse 12, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him”. God desires every man, woman and child ever to live on this earth; every one of His created human beings to be saved by Jesus and His saving work in their place.
 - ➔ If they are not saved, it is not God’s fault. He has done everything needed through His Son. If a person is not saved it’s because that person is the one who is discriminating against God; rejecting God’s Son as Lord and Savior, and rebelling against God by refusing to believe the Word of faith that He has offered as a free gift.
 - ➔ Yet for Paul to say in his day that “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek” – that was the most offensive statement a person could make, because each one of those groups of people took pride in saying that they were better than the other.
 - ➔ Yet God’s Word is all-inclusive in proclaiming both Law and Gospel. Romans 3:23-24 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”. Everyone is guilty and everyone is deserving of eternal separation from God. But the sentence goes on to say that all “...are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”.

- ⌘ Yes, when the Word of faith resides inside of you and me then the Lord “bestows His riches on” us all. Thank God, in Jesus we do not get what we deserve, as verse 13 says, “For ‘everyone, (no discrimination there) who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’.”

Conclusion

- ⌘ This is the message of God’s All-Inclusive Good News that lives inside of us, and upon which we intensify our focus now in the season of Lent. So with Paul in Romans 1:16 we confess, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek”; and yes, to you and me right now today. Amen.