

## God's Greater Story – His Mission for His People

10<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 8/9/20 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Romans 10:5-17 Pastor Keith Besel

v.17 – **“Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”**

### **Introduction**

- ✘ Back in 1961, a visitor walked into the Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow, Scotland. Carrying a brick he searched out and found a painting of the crucifixion and began to destroy it.
  - ➔ His anger; his violence; his desecration of Christian art was not done out of hatred for Christianity but out of a misguided love for Christ. You see, this visitor disagreed with the way the artist had portrayed our Savior's crucifixion.
- ✘ The painting is titled, “*Christ of St. John of the Cross*” by the Italian artist, Salvador Dali. We've placed a copy of the painting at the front of the bulletin today (or the Home Worship Materials if you're listening online).
  - ➔ In this painting we see Jesus, hanging on the cross, over the top of the world. The problem, for this museum visitor, however, was one of perspective. Dali did not stick with the traditional perspective people have on the crucifixion where the viewer is placed below the cross, looking up into the face of Jesus. No, Dali asks the viewer to be situated above the cross; looking down upon Jesus, who is Himself looking down upon the world. To the man with the brick, it is sacrilegious to place yourself above Jesus.
- ✘ For others, however, this is a godly stance, where the artist invites us to have God's view of Christ and the world. And theologically this is a valid view, where our heavenly Father looks down upon the fallen world; seeing it through the eyes of His Son Jesus who is dying on the cross for all people.
  - ➔ This angle of the world though can be difficult for Christians to see; making us want to run away from where God has placed us. We see the social fabric of God's creation tearing apart at the seams; things like same-sex marriage, divorce, and the expectation that couples must live together outside of marriage and how they alter God's plan of one man and one woman for one lifetime.
  - ➔ Or the unabashed and thoughtless killing of children in the womb right next to the ardent fight to preserve the nesting places of an endangered species which speaks of a world that has lost its compass of right and wrong. Rather than valuing all of life, our world tries to dictate that we value only some of life. The perversion and corruption of our culture can often make us want to leave this world behind; enter into our own Christian cocoon, and just wait by ourselves for the Day of Christ's return and the re-creation of all things.
- ✘ Yes, it's easy for us to enter church; turn our eyes upward to the cross and seek to leave the world behind. But when all we see is Jesus, we can forget where our feet are planted and what He would have us do right now. We can forget that we still live in this world where God has chosen us to be involved in His mission while we remain here in this earthly life.
  - ➔ With Dali's view of the crucifixion, we can't escape the world even as we still look at Jesus. No, he reminds us that Jesus asks us to see the world through Him; through the cross where He offers His life for the world; where He invites us to live in His mission of love!
- ✘ This is the perspective that Paul invites the Christians in Rome and all of us Christians today to see. This is the next part of *God's Greater Story* as we continue our series of sermons in the Epistle Readings from Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome.

→ Today we consider two details that Paul highlights: First that we are indeed God's people – saved by grace, and second, that we are God's people involved in His mission; the mission which He saved us to work in and be a part of so that others may hear the word of Christ and be saved by His grace as well.

## I. Saved by grace, not by works:

✘ One of the odd things about Dali's depiction of the crucifixion is that Jesus hangs on the cross without any visible wounds. We see no nails piercing His hands or feet. It looks as if nothing holds Jesus to the cross, which is a disturbing detail for some.

→ They think it makes it look like the crucifixion never happened; like it denies the suffering Jesus endured because of our sins.

✘ For others, however, there is a deep spiritual insight in this painting. When Jesus was crucified, we are the ones who nailed Him to the cross. His own people tried Him; found Him guilty of blasphemy, and rejected their own God in the flesh. And let's be honest, we would do the same had Jesus come among us today.

→ Also we must never forget – Jesus could have delivered Himself at any point ... if He wanted to. Remember when Jesus was betrayed in the garden; how Peter drew his sword to try to protect Jesus. Jesus said, "Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:33).

→ As Jesus hung on the cross, the religious leaders mocked Him; called for Him to come down from the cross and save Himself if He were truly God. But Jesus stayed on the cross, not because He was unable to come down, but because He was truly God and chose not to come down. Jesus didn't come into this world to save Himself. No, He came to save you!

→ It was His pure, godly love that led Jesus to the cross; that held Him there until the penalty for the sins of the whole world had been paid in full through His death! So you see, Jesus hanging on the cross without nails is not an unrealistic picture of the crucifixion but instead a true picture of what happened on that day. God, in the person of Jesus, willingly gave His life for you and for the world in which you live.

✘ This is what Paul highlights for us today; that salvation comes to us purely by grace; only by the love God has poured out for us in Jesus. It is by grace in Christ that we are saved. We didn't do it. We can't earn it and we don't deserve it. It is 100% gift!

→ Paul teaches us this truth by revisiting a text that was familiar to God's people in that day. And just as Dali took a traditional picture of the crucifixion and offered new insight, so Paul took a traditional text and asked God's people to hear it and read it once again.

→ He turns to the book of Deuteronomy. God's people are there, on the edge of the Promised Land. After 40 years in the wilderness, they are about to enter the land but before they enter, God renews His covenant with them. In the beginning of that covenant renewal, God warns the people of Israel about how they should view this moment. Moses says, "Do not say in your heart after God has thrust [the nations] out before you, 'It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land. ... Know therefore that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people" (Deut. 9:4,6).

→ You see, Moses asks them to look at their past and admit that they were stubborn in their sin. They did not earn the Promised Land by any worth of their own. At the end of that covenant renewal, God prophesies to the people of Israel. He tells them that the time will come when they will depart from God and be exiled from this land of promise. It's then that God will come in

mercy. They will repent and He will restore them once again. As always, their lives and their future exist only in the mercy of God.

- ✘ Paul quotes this vision in our Reading today, but he adds his own words for emphasis. He wants us to see God's love, freely given for all people now in Christ Jesus! Listen again to Paul in verses 6-8, "the righteousness based on 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 abyss?' (that is to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? 'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.' (that is the word of faith that we proclaim)".

→ For Paul, that day of restoration had come upon God's people. It came when Jesus came to this world purely by grace. In these words, Paul reaches out to his Jewish brothers and sisters and he invites them to join with the Roman Gentile Christians in confessing salvation in Jesus Christ, by grace, through faith.

→ You see, at the heart of God's covenant lies not what we do for salvation but rather what God does to save us. It's not because we are a mighty or numerous or particularly holy people that we are saved. No, we are stubborn and rebellious; we sin before God every day! But still we are saved by God's mercy shown to us in Jesus. Jesus and His work is the key. He came down from heaven; He entered into hell; and He rose again all by His own love and power. Why? So that you and I might be forgiven; so we might be part of God's people living by His grace through faith.

## II. God's mission accomplished though His people

- ✘ As you listen to our text today, notice how the Promised Land is not limited to a small piece of ground in Israel. No, it expands to include the entire world.

→ Paul says in verses 11-12, "For the Scripture says, 'Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame.' For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him. For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'." You can't miss Paul's emphasis upon "everyone"; "All people"; "Jew and Gentile". God's intention; His mission is to bring His salvation to the ends of the earth!

- ✘ And Paul brings that mission of God down to earth into the very mouths of us; God's people. He asks a series of questions that have obvious answers: "But how are they to call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'" (vv. 14-15)

→ God's intended method for people to enter into His kingdom is through the word of faith that we, His people proclaim!

- ✘ Paul understands both his own part of this mission as he anticipates traveling to Spain for a missionary journey with a stop in Rome along the way and the part of all Christians in God's mission as we enter into a mutual conversation of encouragement and teaching to strengthen each other in our lives of faith.

→ Paul wrote earlier to the Roman Christians, "For I long to see you, that (1) I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you" and (2) ...that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine" (1:11-12). Paul knows this truth about God's greater story. When God brings people into His kingdom, He brings them also into His mission to the ends of the earth.

- Understand this well folks, God gives every person a confession of faith; a word of faith that when it is shared it touches others with God's power in that person's life.
- ✘ Paul says in chapter 1:16 that the gospel of Christ "is the power of salvation to all who believe". This is Paul telling all Christians that you and I have a purpose in God's kingdom. He uses all of us in His mission to share the good-news-word of Jesus with others.
- ✘ Dali's painting gives us a visual reminder of this work of God. (Look at the picture once again.) There, in the heights of heaven, is the cross; Jesus, in love, offering His life for the world.
  - Below Him is the world; extending outward across a lake into the distance. God's love is a love that reaches to the ends of the earth. But how is this love to be communicated to all of those people?
  - At the bottom of the picture we see the answer – two men, going about their task; fishing near the boat. They look like plain men; fishermen. On the surface, nothing sets them apart from others as God's instruments to the world. Yet that's what happens in the ministry of Jesus. He comes and calls plain fishermen to follow Him. They aren't sent to Rome to learn rhetoric from famous speakers. No, they are invited to live with Jesus; to listen to Jesus; to witness what He says and does.
  - And then on Pentecost, Jesus gathers those men together and sends His Holy Spirit upon them and they become apostles; those who are sent out to bring the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth.
- ✘ And this work of Jesus; this sending of His Spirit to speak through His people was not limited only to the apostles. Today it includes "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord"; everyone who is "saved" by that name (v.13).
  - I know what some of you have undoubtedly thought, "But I haven't been trained at a seminary". "I don't know the good news; the 'word of Christ' well enough to proclaim it".
  - But that's the beauty of this mission folks. The story of Jesus' work on the cross and in the empty tomb is a story so simple that even a child could tell it; a story so amazing that only God could bring it about.
  - You don't need special training to speak of what God has already done for you. As Paul writes in verse 8, "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart". God has called you; chosen you to be His people who live by His promise and live for His purpose; His mission to bring salvation to the ends of this earth.

## Conclusion

- ✘ After that visitor attacked Dali's painting it was removed from the art museum, restored and brought back to the museum. Today, thousands of visitors go to Glasgow to see this painting where they marvel at the beauty of Dali's work.
  - Paul tells us of another restoration that causes God's people to stand in wonder. Paul changes our perspective in Romans so that we see Jesus at work through His people bringing salvation to the ends of the earth. It's not you who catches the vision of Christ, but Christ's vision of you is what transforms you; is what catches your breath and causes you to cry out with wonder: "how beautiful...how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" (v.15), that is "the word of Christ" (v.17). Amen.