

lincolnberean

DATE: September 19, 2026
SERIES: The Gospel Is
MESSAGE: Good News For Everyone
PASSAGE: Romans 9:30-10:21
SPEAKER: Ryan Harmon

If you were with us during the month of August, then you're aware that during that month, we introduced a new discipleship theme for the year. We phrased it "come in from the crowd." Come in from the crowd. It's a call to leave the anonymity of the crowd, perhaps even the consumer mindset of the crowd, and to draw near to Jesus, to accept his invitation.

That phrase came ultimately from Matthew 11, verse 28, where Jesus says, "come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The call goes out to come to Jesus, to draw near to him, and each of us—we face a choice. We have a decision to make in response to his call.

Now, it's just a few chapters later, Matthew chapter 22, that then Jesus says, "many are called, but few are chosen." And that sounds like God has made his choice. So the question is, which is it? Has God chosen or is the choice to follow Jesus a genuine choice that we are responsible for? Or is the biblical testimony that maybe it's both? That's what we want to consider tonight as we continue the study of Romans. So open your Bibles with me to Romans. We're going to be in the end of chapter 9, and we're going to finish all of chapter 10 this evening, so we're going to cover a lot of ground.

Now, as you turn there, let me remind you where we have been. As we came to a conclusion last spring, we ended with Romans 8 where Paul lists these stunning promises that are available to us through Jesus Christ and through the gospel. But then, as last week we turned to Romans 9, the tone changed. And at the beginning of Romans 9, Paul was struck with sadness—sadness for his fellow countrymen, his brothers and sisters, Israelites, who by and large had rejected the gospel. And the question that really shaped the chapter and shapes all of Romans 9, 10, and 11 is this one: has God failed on his promise to Israel?

Now Paul's answer to that was emphatic and it was immediate in chapter 9, verse 6. He said, "it is not as though the word of God has failed." God's plan has not run aground. It hasn't gone off course. God, in his sovereignty, never promised to save every single Jewish person. God promised to work with a remnant to move his plan forward. He is absolutely in control. He is moving his plan forward and he is a



lincolnberean

fulfiller of his promises. And that should provide us with great courage, great confidence, as we make our way through life. That's where we ended last week.

Now, as we continue today, after looking at God's sovereignty, Paul now shifts perspective and human responsibility comes into focus. Now, Paul is still going to try to address this problem that is right there in front of him, this problem of unbelief among the majority of his Jewish brothers and sisters. He's going to try to answer the question, "what is going on there?" So that's where he begins at the end of chapter 8, in verse 30. Paul says:

30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; 31 but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, 33 just as it is written, "Behold, I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he who believes in him will not be disappointed."

Now, Paul begins chapter 9, and ultimately, this thought that comes in chapter 10—I'm sorry, he ends chapter 9 and begins chapter 10, the same way he began chapter 9. Full of grief, full of sadness. Sadness over the disbelief, the unbelief, of his countrymen. But Paul also begins with, I think, a deep sense of understanding. He understands exactly where they're at. Now, he begins by saying, "what shall we say then," and I think that's just shorthand for Paul saying, "let me explain to you what's going on."

Let me try to make sense of the circumstances. So he describes precisely what has happened. He starts with something that is unexpected and then he tells us something that is tragic. What's unexpected is the response of the Gentiles. Now, why was their response unexpected? Because the Gentiles had no deep history with God. But furthermore, Paul emphasizes—the Gentiles, he says, did not pursue righteousness, but they attained it. They did not pursue righteousness.

Now we need to remember in Romans what righteousness is. It's an important theme in Romans. The righteousness that Paul speaks of in Romans has primarily to do with attaining right standing before God. Romans makes it clear, every single person who has ever lived has sinned, has rebelled against God, and therefore is unrighteous and absolutely deserving of God's wrath. That's a problem. When we were in Romans 1, 2, and 3, we said the gospel is God's response to our desperate need. We are desperately needy because of our unrighteousness.

Now, in response to our unrighteousness, God is absolutely justified in his wrath. But what's absolutely unexpected is that the Gentiles seem to not care about that one bit. They were not concerned about unrighteousness. They were not



lincolnberean

concerned about somehow trying to find a way to attain righteousness. Therefore they didn't pursue righteousness. That word "pursue" is running language. They didn't chase after it. It wasn't a pursuit, it wasn't a goal of theirs. And yet, shocker of all shockers, they attained it. That is the unexpected, even ironic, outcome.

To use that language of running, let's just kind of capture it somehow in a race metaphor. It's almost as if a group of people that had no interest in running, had no interest in a race, somehow, by the grace of God, finished the race, attained the finish and somehow got a medal. Completely unexpected. They didn't pursue righteousness, yet they attained it, and they attained it on the basis of faith. When the Gentiles learned of the grace of God present in the gospel, that through the gospel, the unrighteous can become righteous by faith, they took it up. They believed it. And they attained the very thing the Israelites so desperately chased after.

That's where Paul turns next, and that's the tragic side of the story. Israel was very consumed with righteousness. They did pursue righteousness, but an important point, they did so by pursuing it through the law of Moses. Israel was trying to attain their own righteousness, trying to earn God's favor by keeping the law. And as they tried to keep it, they failed. Therefore, they never attained that which they were pursuing. That is tragic.

Using the running metaphor, a group of people that were absolutely dedicated to running, trained like crazy, were fanatical about it, didn't even finish the race. Because they were training in the wrong way, and their training took them off course. And that is utterly tragic. That's what Paul's talking about. It's utterly tragic, but it is not a surprise to God.

In verse 33, Paul makes it clear that a stone was placed in front of them. God placed a stone in front of his people, intending to be an obstacle for them, and it would be a stone that someone would either trip over or they would worship. And that stone, Paul makes it clear and the New Testament makes clear, that stone is Jesus Christ. And the Gentiles saw Jesus, learned of him, learned of his gospel, and embraced him. But Israel on the whole, they rejected him. They pursued righteousness on their own terms. Therefore, they stumbled over the stumbling stone.

Now Paul continues, and we hear his heart here, just as we heard it in the beginning of chapter 9. I mentioned that already, Chapter 10, verse 1:

1 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation. 2 For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge. 3 For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject



lincolnberean

themselves to the righteousness of God. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Now, I already mentioned, at the beginning of chapter 9, Paul spoke with passion and grief. And here he takes up that same tone. But here, also, I think he speaks with a sense of understanding, because I believe Paul looked at Israel and he saw his own story.

Paul was absolutely zealous, wasn't he? Zealously opposed to the gospel. Zealously opposed to it until Jesus met him and utterly changed his life. God got a hold of him and took his life in a brand new direction, and Paul understands Israel. It's just like he was. They had a zeal, but not in accordance with knowledge, not in accordance with knowledge. And zeal means fervor. Passion, excitement. And zeal is a good thing. We can affirm zeal. But zeal without knowledge can quickly lead us astray. Knowledge restrains zeal. It guides it correctly. It focuses it. But zeal, untethered to knowledge, can just run off and cause a lot of harm.

Now, Paul is making it clear, Israel had zeal, but they did not understand the revelation of God's way of righteousness. They didn't understand that in Christ, God made a way for the unrighteous to be made, to be declared, righteous. So they were full of passion, but their passion drove them to persist in trying to justify themselves, trying to work harder, trying to earn, trying to prove that they were worthy of God's favor. And that game never works. It never works because no one can justify themselves.

And so in their zeal, they ran forward, but they missed the main point. They missed Jesus Christ, who is, Paul said, the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. Christ is the end of the law. Christ is, to use the metaphor, the finish line, the moment at which the law no longer is a guide and a rule for life. The law no longer domineers. The law no longer is the thing that reigns over life because Jesus has come and he is the end, the termination, of the law.

Now, not only that, there's a second sense in which Jesus is the end of the law. That word "end" can also be translated "goal" or "fulfillment." Jesus is the absolute fulfillment of the law. The law was always pointing to Jesus Christ. But in Israel's zealous unbelief, their zealous ignorance, they continued to run a race that had been finished in Christ. And they were weary. And Paul grieved for them. He grieved for them. Because in Christ, it is the end of the law for all those who put their faith in him, believe in him. All those who believe, everyone, Paul says. But Israel continued to, persisted to, earn, to seek, to earn their righteousness from God. And that is precisely what Paul goes on to describe in verse 5.

5 For Moses [he says Moses] writes that the man who practices [does] the righteousness which is based on the law shall live by that righteousness.



lincolnberean

So Paul is essentially saying, here's the game: if you are going to try to attain righteousness by law keeping, you have to do it perfectly. You can't mess up. You have to live by it. You have to follow it down to the last dot. And although that is not possible—Romans made it clear that only one man has done that and his name was Jesus Christ—although that is not possible, although righteousness cannot be earned, although righteousness cannot be attained through works, although that is an exercise in futility that leads to death, it is what Israel, even in Paul's day, was persisting in. They missed it. Zealous, but ignorant in their zeal.

Now the righteousness that comes by faith could not be more different than the righteousness that Israel was seeking to attain on their own. Paul describes the righteousness that is based on faith. A long paragraph, beginning in verse 6. He says:

6 But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: "Do not say in your heart, 'who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down), 7 or 'who will descend into the abyss?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth, he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For the scripture says, "whoever believes in him will not be disappointed." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on him; 13 for "whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

The righteousness of the law says this: you better do it perfectly. You better do it perfectly. You better make it your sole focus. You better work hard, you better not blink. And the way of pursuing righteousness through the law is a course of life that will wear you down to the bone. Leave you weary. I think that's one of the reasons Jesus said, come to me, all you who are weary. They're tired of trying. They couldn't do it. But the righteousness that comes by faith is not like that. The righteousness available through the gospel is purely a gift of God's grace. A gift of his grace.

Now, in order to demonstrate this, Paul, and he does this throughout Romans, he quotes Old Testament passage after Old Testament passage. And we don't have time to dig into them all, but I do want to talk about verses 6 through 8. Those verses are a little confusing in the background. It comes from Exodus 30, verses 11 to 14. I want to tell you about what those verses are about.



lincolnberean

In Exodus 30, Moses is talking to the people of Israel, and he is warning them. He's warning them and reminding them of the graciousness of God. Because God had clearly communicated to his people, Israel. He had told them precisely what he desired. He had revealed himself. Now in the ancient world that was absolutely unique. All the ancient peoples wondered, "are the gods gonna whack us over the head because we did something wrong and we didn't even know it?" That's not Israel. God came and said, "now here is who you will be as my people."

But in these phrases where Moses says, "now who will ascend to heaven, who will descend into the abyss," Moses is imagining, he is anticipating, excuses from Israel. Excuses that say, "who can know the mind of God?" How are we even supposed to know? God's made it so difficult. His ways are such a mystery. And Moses is reminding them in Exodus or Deuteronomy 30, "no, they aren't." God has clearly communicated to you. God has clearly communicated.

Now what Paul is doing is, he's taking that moment and he is now applying it to what God has done in and through Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, God has communicated sufficiently for salvation. His ways are not a deep mystery. We can't look at God and say, "God, you know what, you made it so hard, we don't even know what you want." God has absolutely communicated what he wants. And in his son—in his incarnation, him coming down, in his resurrection, him being raised up—God has communicated everything and accomplished everything. He has taken care of it all.

Therefore, no one can say to God, you've just made it too difficult for us. Not an excuse. Moses wouldn't stand for it, Paul here is saying, "not an excuse." Because the way of God in the new covenant is simple. It simply requires faith. That's why Paul said, "if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead"—what?—"you'll be saved." Delivered. Brought into life with God, made alive to him.

In order to be saved, one thing is required: faith is required. Belief is required. And when Paul says, "confess and believe with your heart," I don't believe he's talking about two different moments that we need to make or build into something more complex than it truly is. He's simply describing these different aspects of the moment of hearing the gospel and trusting it. Putting our belief in it. He's been abundantly clear in Romans: salvation is by faith. It is that simple.

I actually think that one of the things that does often prevent people from embracing the gospel is its sheer simplicity. It's audacious to us. It almost seems inappropriate. And I think this probably is something also that Israel thought. I think they probably thought, well, man, we're doing all this trigonometry here with the law. It can't possibly be that simple. And I think even today, I think there are people that think it can't be that simple. I never, for my part, I would never simply forgive



lincolnberean

an enemy. How could God do that? In fact, I don't even know if I'm okay with him doing that. So let me work a bit. Let me contribute a little bit to my salvation.

But that's not the way it works. The way of God is the way of grace. And salvation is so simple, a child can do it. A child can do it. Paul simply says that for the Greek and for the Jew, whoever, whoever will call on the name of the Lord, will be saved. Simply calling out to God, reaching out to him in faith, trusting Jesus, that he paid it all. Now that leads Paul to a series of questions. Verse 14, he says:

14 How then will they call on him and whom they have not believed? How will they believe in him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? 15 How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it's written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!"

Now, in a moment, I want to talk and address the way we often apply this text. But before I do that, I want to talk about God—Paul's, not God's, God's also—Paul's original intent. Here's what Paul is saying here, and I think sometimes we miss it. What Paul is saying is that the good news of Jesus, the gospel, has already been sufficiently proclaimed so that no one has an excuse. No one can claim ignorance. That's what Paul's saying with those questions. His questions have a logical flow, but let me start at the end and work backwards so we can gain a sense of what he's saying.

So he says, at the very end, "have preachers been sent?" And the answer to that is, yes, Paul himself is a preacher. There was a vast missionary effort happening in the years following the resurrection. Have preachers been sent? Absolutely. Have those preachers preached Jesus? Yes, absolutely. Have all people, have the Israelites, certainly, but have also a number of Gentiles, have they heard the gospel? Have they heard of Jesus? Yes. But have they believed? No. Have they, therefore, called on the one in whom they believed? Well, no, absolutely not.

So going back to our larger question, has God failed in delivering on his promises? Answer, not for a second. Then what's happened? Why have so many Israelites at this time not been caught up in the people of God? Answer: they persist in unbelief. They persist in unbelief. They heard the gospel, and they did not believe the gospel.

Now, so often today—just talk about this for a moment—so often today, we preach this text as a missionary call text. It's a call to missions. And while that is not the original intent in Romans 9, that's a great application of the text. There is a principle within this series of questions: someone cannot believe in him whom they have not heard of, therefore, people have to go. It's perfect application. As people, we want to be a church that takes up this call, that understands and is



lincolnberean

passionate about the call, to make disciples among all nations. Because although Paul could be quite confident of the missionary efforts in his day, every generation must once again take up that call. Must be passionate about it. Must say there are people and there are places where Jesus is not known, therefore, send me. And we want to be a church that does that. There are places in the world that the name of Jesus is not known, never heard of him. So we ask, how can they believe and be saved if they have not heard? Therefore, there is a great imperative to go. And I pray that God would raise up missionaries and send them out from this church.

But it's not only a global call. This also has a local application. Because each of us need to know that we have a part to play in God's global work. We have a part to play in God's local work. Because there are people in our city who are living lives that are deadened, not alive to God. Communities not alive to God. They need to hear the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And I am confident God desires to have your feet, the very two on your legs right now, to have those feet be feet that bring good news. To go to those who believe they know Jesus, believe they understand everything about him and say, "you know, not so fast, there's more. I don't think you do know him because if you knew him, you would love him." To bring the truth of Jesus Christ to bear in the lives of our neighbors, our friends, in this community, and ultimately throughout the world.

So Paul says the word has gone out. It has gone out. Therefore, what that means is that every single person has to make a decision. When the word of the gospel goes out, it brings with it a moment of decision. Someone has to decide, what will I do with this proclamation of truth? And we see the results here in the next few verses as we finish the chapter. Paul says in verse 16:

16 However, they did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?" 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. 18 But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." 19 But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? First Moses says, "I will make you jealous by that which is not a nation, by a nation without understanding will I anger you." 20 And Isaiah is very bold and says, "I was found by those who did not seek me, I became manifest to those who did not ask for me." 21 But as for Israel he says, "All the day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

Has God's word failed? Never. Paul said, "may it not be." But Israel has persisted in their pursuit of self-righteousness. They have refused to believe the gospel, and Israel is responsible for their unbelief. Israel is responsible. This is the human side of the equation.



lincolnberean

As Paul finishes this chapter, he wants to make a few points that he's made already in chapter 9 and in chapter 10, but he wants to do it a bit more impactfully. The first thing he wants to make clear is that God has absolutely made himself sufficiently known so that no one can say they have an excuse. No one can plead ignorance.

Now, he does that in an interesting way. He goes and calls back to Psalm 19, which actually is about how the creation order demonstrates and proclaims who God is, says their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. In other words, God's ways, his character, is not shrouded in mystery. God is there. His evidence is there for those who seek after him. Romans 1 and 2 made this very clear to us. In Romans 1, it says that his eternal power and divine nature are evident by looking at that which is created. In other words, no one can say, "I had no evidence." God has left behind ample evidence of himself.

Now, this is a general principle that Paul is using Psalm 19 to demonstrate, but what that becomes when we look at it in light of the incarnation is not just a general principle, but a historical reality. Jesus came on the scene, and do we really think that anyone in that day did not have knowledge of who he was as he made his way throughout the Judean countryside and healed people and walked on water and performed miracles? Do we really think that there were people that said, "never heard of him"? I don't think it's possible.

In fact, in the Greco-Roman world, the larger Mediterranean world, here's what's astounding. The gospel was having such an impact that Roman emperors were concerned about it. Now, do we really think it's possible for anyone to plead ignorance when that is the case? Not only that, but Romans itself, we believe it was written about around 57 AD, which is just a mere twenty-four, twenty-five years after the resurrection. Which means that there are plenty of people who were first-person witnesses of Jesus Christ and his miracles, and his demonstrations of power, and his death and his resurrection. Paul's point is this: God has made himself abundantly clear. No one has an excuse.

Now his second point is this. He's already emphasized this as well, especially in Romans 9. While Israel is fully responsible for their unbelief, God foreshadowed, he announced, what would happen because God sovereignly sees it all. But not only that, God also patiently, patiently stretched out his hand to them as they persisted, and as they continue in Paul's day, to persist in unbelief.

To demonstrate this, Paul uses quotes from Deuteronomy and Isaiah. And in using those quotes, he's highlighting that he knew Israel would persist in unbelief—that in response, he would use Gentiles to stir up jealousy in his people. And that he would stay with them. He would persist. He is faithful. And he is patient. He would not give up.



lincolnberean

Look at how this passage ends. It's a quote from Isaiah 65. God says, "all day I've stretched out my hand." All day, to a disobedient and obstinate people. How long? All day long. God stretches out his hand and God continues to stretch out his hand, not just for his people, Israel, but for all people, calling them to himself.

What is abundantly clear in Romans 9 and Romans 10 is that God is absolutely incredibly patient. God is faithful to his promises. God is sovereign. He is in charge of all things, and Israel, and us. And every single human being that has ever lived is responsible for what we do with Jesus Christ, how we will respond to him and whether or not we will receive the truth of the gospel. Israel had persisted in their unbelief. Therefore, they are responsible for their unbelief. This gets us back to a larger question: does their unbelief somehow compromise God's promises or God's plan? Answer: not at all.

Last week, we talked about how God is absolutely committed to his promises. He will fulfill them precisely as he has always intended. And he is in charge of all things. God is moving his plan forward. The Bible and Romans 9 makes that abundantly clear, yet at the same time, at the same time we must remember that God's sovereignty does not eliminate human freedom and human responsibility. And so was Israel, and are we, absolutely responsible with what we do to the gospel of Jesus Christ? Whether or not we will submit to it or whether we will reject it? Absolutely we are. The Bible makes that clear.

Now, how do we work that out? My answer is, I don't know. I don't know. But here's what I do know. What I know is that this topic, this debate, this conversation, these ideas, they bring us to a place where I am concerned that this debate will start to immerse us so much as God's people. We will begin to overthink it and overanalyze to such an extent that we will miss out on what God is calling us to in these texts.

We talked about God's sovereignty. It is deep, it is complex. Our feeble, futile minds are incapable of understanding it fully. But if we will submit ourselves to it and we will name it as true, it can bring us incredible confidence and courage that our God is in charge. No matter what we are going through, our God is in charge. Gives us courage.

Now, how? How does his divine sovereignty interact with human responsibility? It'd be easy in the midst of that to get distracted by all the complexity and try to figure all that out and mull over it and consider it and talk about it and lose the forest for the trees. Because here is the call. We as human beings have been granted by God, in his sovereignty, great freedom and great responsibility. And when the gospel is proclaimed, it demands that we make a decision.



lincolnberean

What will we do with the gospel? Will we believe the gospel? Will we believe God's free offer of righteousness given through Jesus Christ and receive it by faith, or will we reject it? That's the question. God is sovereign. We are responsible. And whether we are young or old, whether we are rich or poor—no matter who we are or where we come from, here is the truth: if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, if you put your faith in Jesus, you will be saved.

That's the gospel truth. That's good news. That's good news for everyone. And I would be remiss even if there was one single person, one single person that has never placed their faith in Jesus, it would be malpractice of me as a pastor to not ask you this: will you believe the gospel? Right now, will you believe the gospel? If you will, you will be saved.

Our Father, we thank you. We thank you that by your grace you sent your son, that we, the unrighteous, could be righteous, Lord. And I pray that even now, even now you would pursue every single person in this room, that the gospel would be something that we not only believe one time, but we believe every day. We believe every day that the gracious offer of life with you is available through faith. Lord, if there's anyone, anyone that has not placed their faith in Jesus, Lord, I pray now, you would bring conviction upon them by your Holy Spirit, that they might submit and enter in to the life that is truly life. Lord, we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE
Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988, 1995
The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.*

Copyright 2026 Lincoln Berean Church. All rights reserved.

