

Romans 10:5-21: Our responsibility and our salvation

Intro: In the morning, my kids and I have a ritual of making oatmeal. We get out bowls, oatmeal, chia seeds, blueberries, cinnamon. And my 3 year old and 2 year old stand on stools and put the oatmeal in their bowls with a scooper, and the blueberries, and other ingredients, mostly in the bowls, etc. And then we microwave their creations and they eat.

Now my kids are an important part of the process of bringing about the reality of their breakfast. At the same time, despite the roles they have, I would still say its my wife and I's choice to give them oatmeal each morning. We pay for it, we drive to get it at the store to get it, and we set up the station, teach them to scoop it, and even make sure it gets in their bellies. Its our choice, and we ensure they eat oatmeal each morning.

But also, I have to say, my kid's actions in the process are important: We have given them a responsibility: their scoops are our chosen method of putting the oatmeal together. This means, if they want to play instead, I'll say, no, its time to eat, and we arent going to eat until you have made the oatmeal. I say this because the responsibility is important for them. If I want them to really change and grow, a huge part of that is engaging their own actions, and walking with them toward new choices and habits for themselves. But also, as they carry out their responsibility, I don't want them to be overwhelmed with stress, thinking their sustenance is only on their shoulders. That's far too heavy of a burden for a 3 year old, and its not true. At the end of the day, I want them to know three things: Its my choice to give them oatmeal, and they have a real responsibility in the process, and im right there with them to guide them and make sure it ends up in their bellies.

Why do I tell you about this little oatmeal ritual? I tell you about this because according to Romans, this is our situation before the Lord: we have heard in Romans 9 about a God who chooses himself to give salvation, he drove to the store, he paid for it, he brought it back, and by his spirit, he makes sure it gets into many sinner's bellies. And because God is providing the salvation, that means its up to Him who He saves, and when. You did not choose me, but I chose You, Jesus says. And God wants us to know our salvation is not riding on us, on some action by us, or quality in us, or even a choice we make, because otherwise we would be either overwhelmed with a salvation burden we cant carry, or pridefully thinking we got ourselves saved and others didn't. God says no: it was my choice, and frankly I chose the bottom of the barrel for salvation to show forth the abundance of my mercy.

Now this reality of God's choice has led some in church history to assume, if God is providing the oatmeal for myself and others, that means I can spend my life *playing*. I can just chill out and focus on me. I don't really have to seek God personally, or strive to put to death sin in my life, or get into the messiness of God's people in the church. I don't have to really serve the poor, or seek out those who don't know God, and strive to

share about God's gospel. If God is providing the oatmeal for us, we are going to get it whether we do anything or not, and same with my neighbor. So we get to play.

In our passage this morning, God our Father is going to say very clearly: no. You won't eat the oatmeal until you scoop it into the bowl. And your neighbor won't eat until you help him scoop some into his. Just like God has chosen to give us oatmeal, God has also chosen us as his means for putting it together, and so we walk this world with a serious responsibility. This morning, we are going to talk about the real responsibility you carry in your salvation and for that of others.

So we are going to see two scoops that must happen before you or others eat the oatmeal of salvation:

1. **Our responsibility to *believe* for our salvation**
2. **Our responsibility to *preach* for other's salvation**

Lets pray

1. Our responsibility to *believe* for our salvation: So what must you do to experience the salvation of God? Paul first starts by defining what your responsibility is **not**: Look in vv. ⁵*For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does **the commandments** shall live by them.* This is referencing that you could try to attain salvation based on your obedience to God's law, and if that's your strategy, then your responsibility under the law is doing all of God's commandments. And of course, for someone born into sin, like you and I, we have already messed that strategy up a long, long time ago. Its now impossible for all of us. Going back to the oatmeal analogy, my kids can help scoop the oatmeal, but they would never figure out how to drive to the store to get the oatmeal, they have no driving skills and no money, and we sinners before salvation are like them, and in fact we have already totaled the car going the opposite direction and killed ourselves and others in the process. So we can only be saved by someone else bringing the oatmeal to us, and by us looking to that person, which is righteousness based on faith. And the reason Paul includes this statement here is to say: whatever your salvation responsibility is under this faith, it is **not** doing all of Gods commands. To be saved, you and I do not have to obey perfectly- -thank God. Now this doesn't mean we don't strive to obey God's commands for many other reasons, and even have a duty to do so, but not for our salvation.

And this is because God has gone to the store for you: look at vv. 6 ⁶*But the righteousness based on **faith** (not the law) says, "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"* So here is two OT quotes strung together, and what Paul is doing is showing how God has brought salvation near to you, which means you don't have to drive to the store.*

The first quote is the short phrase: “do not say in your heart,” and this comes from Deut 9:4 when God told his people: “4“Do not say in your heart ‘ It is because of my righteousness that the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,’ for you are a stubborn people.” In that moment, God told Israel, you are enjoying many blessings, but its not because of your righteousness, your actions, your choices, but instead because I brought those blessings near to an undeserving, stubborn people. Its not because of you, but because of me. First quote.

The next quote is from Deuteronomy 30, and it elaborates on how God brought his blessings near, and how that lightens our responsibility for salvation: ¹¹“For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. ¹²It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ ¹³Neither is it beyond the sea (or the abyss) that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ ¹⁴But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.

So here God is saying, he has brought himself and his word near to Isreal, so they dont have to ascend to heaven, or go into the depths of the sea, or beyond the sea, or all the way to grocery store and back, God has brought salvation to them himself, even brought it inside them, in their hearts. And this meant the responsibility for the sinner for salvation was not something impossible: it was doable for them to reach it. And notice Paul connects this with Jesus: *“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 that we proclaim)”* Paul is adding, Jesus is God’s word brought near. We don’t need to ascend to heaven, because Jesus, God’s word, has come down to us in the flesh. We don’t need to descend into the depths of the sea, the abyss, because Jesus has gone down to death, and rose again to us. Jesus is God’s word doing all the things we couldn’t do for our salvation. And notice at the end, this includes Jesus sending the apostles and the church out to proclaim Jesus’s words of faith, bringing God’s word near to the world. This is why you are listening to Jesus in this service, in this text, 2000 years later. I am speaking them in my mouth. You are holding his words in your hand. And while that happens, the Holy spirit is using the word in a living way to pierce to the division of your soul and your spirit, its in your heart, right now. He is in piercing into your heart.

And all that nearness means whatever our responsibility is about to be, its doable for us, because God made it so. Jesus has done all the hard stuff. Gone up, come down. And now its all right here. So what must we **do** to be saved?

⁹ *because 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.* ¹⁰ *For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.* So thats it: our responsibility is faith from the heart in Jesus: belief in his lordship, his resurrection, essentially trusting him to bring us our salvation. And out of the heart the mouth speaks

a confession of faith. I trust you, Jesus. And if this is our only human responsibility for salvation, that means, Paul continues, anyone can do it: religious or not, good or not, disciplined or not, no matter where you are from or what you have done or haven't done: Vv 11: **"Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."** 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.* ¹³ *For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."* Notice what faith looks like here, the natural expression of it, is calling upon the Lord. "Call upon" in Greek referred to when someone invoked the divine, summoned God or the gods to ask for intervention in their life. This is what we must do with Jesus, for our salvation--call upon him. Its what we see over and over in the gospels when people cry out to Jesus, have mercy on me, son of David. To cry out to him from the heart is the truest expression of faith. And notice the promise: everyone who does this, everyone who calls on Jesus from faith in the heart, will be saved.

So thats our responsibility Its not too hard, not too far away, Christ has brought it near, its right here in front of you, and salvation is promised to all who take that step.

Notice this is only a few verses after Romans 9, where we saw God chooses those who he will save, and our salvation is based on God who calls us, *but* now we read, salvation is near and open to all who call upon the Lord themselves. You might be wondering, how in the world could these two truths fit together? As we saw a few weeks ago, often people try to choose between these two truths, and then fall into error. But the Bible doesn't, and you don't have to. Here is how theologians make sense of both God's choice for salvation and God's blanket offer of salvation to all: those who find themselves stirred up to call on God, are those whom God has already been calling to in their hearts. Those who find themselves scooping oatmeal, are the very ones God has already set up the station for, and given the ability by the spirit to bring their hand to the scoop. Because otherwise, we saw in Romans 3, no one dead in sin, in slavery to sin, calls on God, no one seeks God, no one understands, no one does good, not one, unless of course, God calls to them first, unless God brings salvation near to their hearts.

And so even with Romans 9, because of Romans 9, the blanket promise stands, anyone who calls on God, who wants to be saved, can be, right now. And because God has brought it near to us, its here. Just call upon me, Jesus says.

Illustration: When it rained really hard for days on end a few weeks ago, I went out there. Got the raincoat, got the kids raincoats, and we went out in the pouring rain. And it was awesome, raging rivers had formed all over the place, and we adventured. We head down hill, towards Hamilton lake, where the water in all its glory was flowing, and normally there is a little creek at the bottom that trickles through the park, but on this day, it was the Nile river. It was the Amazon. Class 5 rapids. And I remember seeing my 2 year old son, inch closer and closer to the torrent, and step his boot in deeper and deeper, so drawn to its beauty, to see it pull him in, and you could tell, he wanted to go, there were no barriers, it was on his foot, his ankle, his knees, he could only let go, and

get swept down to the power and beauty of it all. It was almost irresistible, were I not holding him back.

I wonder, do you see how this passage is that raging river for you? All those being called on by the Lord are being pulled in through these words, pulled in to the beauty, pulled into the Lord himself. He has unblocked your ears so you can hear Him, he has opened your eyes to see him, he has carried your salvation to the cross, to the grave, to your chair and ears, and mouth, and inside you, and now the water of this passage pulls you to finally use your own voice to cry out to him. He is saying to you, right now, I'm not too hard for you to reach, I'm not too far away from you, I'm open to all, and all means you. All you have to do is call on me, and let go, and get swept up into my arms. Theologians call this process of us exercising our own responsibility in salvation "irresistible grace," that all who have been truly called on by God do eventually, of their own will, use their voice to genuinely call on him from the heart, they give in themselves to the river, they make the oatmeal, and exercise their responsibility of faith, because Jesus is too beautiful and good and alluring for the awakened sinner to resist.

Application: And I wonder today, do you hear him calling you? Did you think you had to obey all his commands to reach him today? He says here: You don't. Did you think he was too far away from you? He's not. The water is at your knees, your waist, won't you let go and call upon him who loves you? Why would you wait?

Whether you are a Christian or not today, I want to give a minute, right now, for us to call upon him. If you have never done this before, and don't know how, the process is actually really easy: we just say something like, Lord Jesus have mercy on me, save my soul from my sin, you alone can do this, I need you. If you have already called upon him from your heart at some point in your life, or even a few times earlier this morning, this still is an opportunity for us Christians, this is how we go deeper with the Lord, continually crying out to him and relying on him more and more each day for everything. Lord Jesus have mercy on me today, I need you today. Let's take a moment of silence to call upon him.

Silence

That's our responsibility for salvation. God provides oatmeal, but he gives us responsibility, to teach us to exercise faith in his son.

Transition: Now as soon as we do this, we saw in Romans we are united to Jesus, connected to his body like a branch to a plant, and we actually gain a new responsibility: and that is, for Jesus to use our voices to call upon others who desperately need to hear from him. We are his means to reach the rest of the world: our family, and friends, and neighbors, and coworkers, those that we too have unceasing anguish for in our hearts to know the grace of God on offer for them. This is #2:

Our responsibility to *preach* for other's salvation: Look at this necessary chain of events that leads to someone else in your life calling upon the Lord. *14 How then will*

*they call on 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**?*
¹⁵ *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!"* So here is an unbroken chain (SLIDE): between God sending us to preach, and someone else coming to faith, and the point is, the someone else's calling on Jesus part can't happen without the our preaching part.

The word preaching here means acting as a herald, an ambassador, a messenger, announcing a message or news from the one who sent you. And notice, though God still provides the oatmeal in this chain of events, the oatmeal doesn't get made unless our responsibility now to be the voice of Jesus is carried out. How are they to hear unless someone sent preaches to them?

Largely the earliest writings we have from the early church are martyrdoms and apologies. Apologies are Christians being messengers of their beliefs to others: doing everything they could to persuade Jews, Greeks, emperors, those of other religions and philosophies, to trust in Jesus. Martyrdoms are the accounts of early Christians being put to death for the apologies, for proclaiming Jesus. And in the martyrdoms, it's very clear the early Christians saw it as a privilege to be killed proclaiming Christ—something even to be desired. After all, Jesus said Blessed are those who are persecuted for my sake. They saw by being faced with martyrdom, they were specially called up by God into intimate share in Christ's sufferings, they were given a chance to be a herald unto death, the most powerful witness to others. They called the blood of martyrs the seed of the church. And through it they finished their Christian race and attained Christ. Ignatius, a disciple of John about to be martyred, wrote to a number of churches: He said seriously, "Don't envy me for attaining Christ today," "don't envy me" on his way to being torn apart by lions in the arena. That's how they thought of it: something to be envied.

Some of the Greeks, seeing these joyful martyrdoms, asked why Christians wouldn't just all kill themselves and go be with Jesus, and stop troubling us with this message.
P. 189

Justin Martyr responded to this, saying, if we, the church, all went to be with Jesus of our own accord, and shirked this responsibility from here in Romans 10 of being God's heralds, we would become the reason no one would ever be born again of the spirit, we would become the reason all those who desperately need God would ever be instructed about Him. To remove God's mouthpiece from the world, and the body of Christ, leads to no salvation for anyone, and he even says, potentially the end of the human race. Do you see the responsibility the early church carried, you guys don't eat oatmeal without us preaching. We have to preach. In fact the only reason why we are here and not with Jesus, is for you!

And they learned that from the apostle Paul, who wrote this passage, he says this exact same thing: Phil 1 (SLIDE): ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet my desire is to depart and be with

Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

So basically, the only reason I haven't gone and gotten martyred, is to keep proclaiming the Lord to those who desperately need him. I'd rather be with Jesus, but I'm here for you.

Our goal for Hope chapel this year has been remembering the church, remembering who we are together, and if we somehow miss this main responsibility we hold to those out there, largely the reason any of us are still here on this earth, then we have missed it all. It's been said the church is one of the only organizations that exists largely for the sake of its non-members, and so easily we can forget that. They don't eat oatmeal without us bringing the message to them. And we are sent by God, kept in this world, for that purpose.

Illustration: I wonder, have you ever tried to do a home project without the proper tool? I find myself in this situation sometimes: I may not want to fork out the money for the tool, or may not want to drive to someone's house to borrow the tool. And I just have to unscrew this one little nut under the sink, but none of my wrenches fit in there. And so I find 17 different random tools, none of them suited for the task, and I lodge each one in there, and each one only serves to damage the nut more, and get it more stuck, and eventually I get frustrated and decide to go buy or borrow the right tool.

For this heralding responsibility the Lord has given to us, I know many of you feel like the wrong tool. I'm just not one to do this kind of heralding, I'm not gifted at evangelism or preaching, I'm introverted, I don't know how to answer questions about God, and in my story, I've seen this heralding done really poorly, in damaging ways, so many times, so no, I'm just not one to do this. I'm not the right tool. Others are, and God will save through them instead.

And of course, if you feel this way, you won't find yourself heralding much. You will lay as an unused tool on the tool shelf observing the stuck nuts under the sink: your siblings, your parent, your child, your neighbors who don't know the Lord, and you may try to get to know them some and care for them, but you never engage about what matters most: Jesus, and their souls, his grace and love brought near to them.

And the main problem with that tool picture is that to God, you are not the wrong tool, you are the exact tool, in fact the only tool, that can get those pieces unstuck. It's your purpose here, he sends you for this reason. Have you ever gotten a piece of furniture but you have to put it together, and the company not only sends you all the pieces, but they send you the special tool you need for it: one special drill bit that exactly fits the screws it's around. You are the sent tool into the lives of those stuck there. And notice this: God didn't send me to your sister—I don't know her, she lives in DC, she will likely never hear me preach anything. God didn't send me live in a house next to your neighbor. God didn't send me into your company, or put me every morning, noon, and night over your children, he sent you to each of those places. You are the exact tool

enclosed in the packaging, with all your doubts, all your shortcomings, all your introvertedness, your awkwardness, your busyness, and God said, this is the exact tool I have to free this person, and to build something beautiful. He sent you, and his power is made perfect in your weakness, and he asks today, how are they going to get free if tool I fashioned lays there on the shelf? How are they to hear without the one sent to them preaching?

Now I know it can be hard to know how to do well. So I want to recommend a few books for those who feel stuck, who don't know quite what it looks like to be God's herald to others in your life. If this is you, please get these and read them.

Each year as staff and elders, we gather and talk through Hope Chapel's areas of growth for this next year, and how we can address them, one that has come up, a place we feel we want to grow, is us engaging this responsibility: being heralds to unbelievers. It's a place that I would like to grow personally. And for our church, we have a hope, one day, to see regularly 10, 15 people who do not know the Lord, coming on a Sunday and sitting in the back, because 10 or 15 of you pursued them over time and invited them to come. And maybe I go and introduce myself to one of them, and her name is Sue, and I ask Sue what led you to come to hope chapel, and she says, well Marianne weatherly is my neighbor, and she and walker invited me for dinner, and got to know me, and asked all about my life, and I was in a tough spot, and they offered to pray for me, and they kept checking in and reaching out over the next year, and eventually we became friends, and one night, we talked about religion, and my history with all that, and Marianne asked me what prevented me from being more open to Jesus, and maybe coming to church with her and walker? And I told her about all my issues with God. And she didn't respond with judgment or anger, but listened, and she cared. And a few weeks later, she shared about her experience with God, and how she came to know him, and her God sounded so different than the God I have been rejecting. And it got me thinking, maybe I need to come see more about this God. Now I still don't believe in him, or trust all this, but here I am.

Its our hope for our church regularly have Sues in the back, who are the fruit of us diligently carrying out this responsibility in the same way the early church did, over years of time, making room for non Christians in our lives, and in our hearts, and being brave enough to be heralds to them, to talk about Jesus.

That's our responsibility to preach for other's salvation.

Paul ends this section connecting this dual responsibility back to Israel, and whats happened with Paul's kinsmen who he has unceasing anguish for. And he basically says: Israel has been preached to, they have heard, they have understood, and yet they have not believed. He ends with a quote from God: "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people." The picture is God all day holding out his hands to Israel, but them stubbornly refusing to be embraced by him. Nowhere is that seen more clearly than the cross, God himself coming in the flesh, to plead with his people to come back to himself, but instead being reviled and tortured, and put to death,

even as he stretches out his hands to save. Oh jerusalem, how often I would have gathered you under my wings but you were not willing, jesus cries.

This means, for some people in our lives, as much as you herald and plead and try to convince them of Jesus with your words and deeds, it wont be enough. And that won't mean you aren't the right tool. In our efforts over a lifetime to reach our loved ones, we join Jesus as God's outstretched arms, all day long, calling them back, which is who God is and what he does whether the other person ever receives the hug or not. All day long.

As Jesus's body, as his arms and hands, this is now our glorious responsibility, to believe for our salvation, and to hold out God's arms, and preach for other's salvation.

Father, may you send your spirit to equip us for carrying out these two tasks, and may we live in a manner worthy of your calling in Christ Jesus. Amen.