

Prayer

Lord God, our Rock and Redeemer, we call on You;
be our strength when things go wrong and we are weak with fear;
be our courage when life is tough and we lack bravery to do good;
be our inspiration when little happens and we lack enthusiasm;
Come among us, Rock and Redeemer, and save us now!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Retailing

Pray that our governments will enact laws that regulate and control the retailing industries of your country effectively, for the good of all people, both workers and consumers.

On-going prayers

- *Pray that God's people will show good morality to the world*
- *Pray for your country's political parties and how they are funded*
- *Give thanks for the strength and courage God has given you*

Meditation

(A reflection on Prov. 29:11, Is. 18:4, Lam. 3:26, Hab. 3:16, 1 Thess 4:11)

Be quiet, O my soul, and honour the Lord;
In wisdom, watch your emotions,
Take care not to vent bad feeling.

Be quiet, O my soul, and be like the Lord;
Waits patiently for the time to act
Whether hard or easy for the soul.

Be quiet, O my soul, and expect the Lord;
He proffers the gift of salvation
To be completed in eternity!

Be quiet, O my soul, and trust the Lord;
For the day of trouble brings fear,
Yet He alone can save you.

Be quiet, O my soul, and feed on the Lord;
Live quietly, look after yourself,
Seek to do His will forever.

Bible Study - Romans 10:14-21

¹⁴ How then, can they call on Him if they have not come to believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they have never heard of Him? And how can they hear unless someone preaches? ¹⁵ And how can people preach unless they are sent out to do this? (As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!') ¹⁶ But not everyone has responded to the Gospel, for Isaiah says 'Lord, who has believed our message?') ¹⁷ So then, faith comes from what we have heard and what we have heard comes from the Word of Christ.

¹⁸ But I ask: Have they not heard? They certainly did;

'Their voice has gone out into all the world,
and their words to the ends of the world.'

¹⁹ Again, I say: Did Israel not understand? Firstly, Moses says:

'I will make You jealous of those who are not a nation,
I will make you angry because of a foolish people.'

²⁰ And Isaiah speaks boldly when he says:

'I have been found by those who did not seek me,
I have revealed myself to those who did not ask for me.'

²¹ But speaking about Israel, he says;

'All day long I have stretched out my hands
to a disobedient and rebellious people.'

Review

The first half of this passage is an inspiring explanation of the need to preach the Word of God so that the Gospel might be heard throughout the World (10:14-17). As such, it is a favourite text for use when commissioning people to be missionaries, and has been used for centuries in this way. Paul's words are indeed a substantial exposition of the Christian endeavour in preaching the Gospel, but his deeper concerns come to the fore as soon as he explains it more fully. The task of declaring the 'good news' of God was first given to Israel (10:15,16), and although it remains the task of all God's people, both Jew and Gentile, Paul was still concerned about the inability of the Jews to accept this task (10:19-21).

Paul had grasped the essential truth of the Gospel of God, which is that it was to be presented to all people of all time and in all places; and throughout chapter 10, he gradually extracted this theme from various scriptural texts (see his quotes from Moses 10:5-8) and the teaching of Jesus and the early church. In this passage, Paul focussed on what we now call 'communication', and although the subject was not taught then as it is today, Paul knew that it was of prime importance for the Gospel. In general, God did not bring His 'good news' to people by unilateral inspiration, He intended, and had always intended, that the Gospel be passed on from one human being to another. In this passage, Paul highlights the importance of preaching, although this does not ignore the importance of personal communication in conviction and integrity.

So it is that when Paul concluded at the end of yesterday's passage that 'all who call on the name of the lord will be saved' (10:13), he immediately launched into a powerful description of God's purpose and intention for the communication of the Gospel (10:14-17). He asks a series of questions to demonstrate the logic of communication, and this reaches its climax in two ways. Firstly, he emphasises the preaching of the Gospel with this question, 'how can they hear unless someone preaches?' Secondly, he tied the proclamation of the Gospel irrevocably to 'the Word of Christ', and the early Christian church believed that this was contained in the unique witness of the record of Jesus' life and death and its affect on the world; and by this we mean the New Testament. In this way, Paul set out the stall for what we now call evangelism; the commissioned preaching of the Gospel for the salvation of souls.

But towards the end of this great text, Paul added a parenthesis. In this, Paul quotes the famous text from Isaiah about the bringing of the Good News, 'how beautiful are the feet of those who bring the Good News!' (Isaiah 52:7), and added the equally famous words from Isaiah 53:1 'Lord, who has believed our message?' Both of these texts speak of God's work through Jesus, but He wanted to make clear that preaching the Gospel was no guarantee of converts to Christ and His Kingdom, for on his mind was still the painful fact that his own people, the Jews, had largely failed to accept the Gospel. To explain this, Paul quoted from a number of Old Testament texts; Psalm 19:4 (10:18). This, and quotes from the Law (Deut. 32:21 – see verse 19) and the Prophets (Isaiah 65:1,2 – see verses 20 and 21) make it very plain that all Scripture speaks of God's intention to bless the whole world through the preaching of the Gospel despite the rejection of the Jews.

In chapter 10 of his letter to the Romans, Paul has come full circle, beginning and ending the chapter with the subject of why the People of Israel have rejected the Messiah. Yet such is Paul's faith that even whilst addressing this difficult issue, he is inspired by the Spirit to say even more about the Gospel. The result is that today's passage is a source of inspiration to many people who preach the Gospel throughout the world.

Going Deeper

The Bible study continues with further information about the following subjects:

- Paul's version of the Great Commission
- The rejection of the Gospel by the Jewish people
- The significance of Isaiah's prophecies

Going Deeper

Obviously, there are two separate sections to this passage, but they do connect, and there are some intriguing issues to look at. Firstly, Paul's sequence from belief to preaching (verses 14 to 17) is constructed a little strangely, and secondly we need to look further at why Paul chose the passages he did from the Law and the Prophets (vv18-21). Paul's writing is rarely completely straightforward!

Paul's version of the Great Commission

At the end of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says to the disciples in great solemnity: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them ... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you to the end of the age.' This is known as the 'Great Commission'. Paul was not there at this supremely important moment, but he was the one who, eventually, became the figurehead for this great evangelistic endeavour by which the Kingdom of God was established on earth according to God's will, through the Church. The Holy Spirit certainly used Peter and the other disciples, but it was Paul who became known as the great evangelist to the Gentiles. Our passage today contains what the Spirit revealed to Paul about the commission to preach and evangelise.

When we read these verses (10:14,15), their message seems obvious, but there is more here than meets the eye. Clearly, no-one can come to faith in Jesus Christ unless they have heard about Him, they cannot hear unless there are preachers, and there are no preachers unless they are commissioned and sent (10:14,15). But this is not the end of the sequence; it is picked up again in verse 17 in which Paul makes a crucial final connection, which is that the faith which is preached originates from Christ Himself; the passage itself says 'what we have heard comes from the Word of Christ.' It is interesting that the word for 'Word' is not what we might expect for referring to the teaching of Jesus, although it is obviously essential that the preached Gospel should have its origins in what Jesus Himself taught. The Greek word used in verse 17 is 'rema', which means 'word or saying; thing, matter, event or happening.' In other words, the Gospel originates not just in Jesus' spoken teaching, but the whole event of His life and death, and His resurrection and ascension! This is not immediately obvious to us from the passage, and it is almost impossible to find a form of words in English which conveys this sense of 'everything about Jesus'. However, it is surely true that the preaching of the Gospel finds its origins in everything about Jesus; in what He both said and did, and in his death and resurrection in particular.

Almost everyone who has written about this passage of Scripture has noted that the sequence of questions begun in verses 14 and 15 are concluded in verse 17. However, not everyone has concluded, as I have, that the two quotes from Isaiah which appear at the end of verse 15 and in verse 16 therefore form a 'parenthesis'; which is the written version of a side comment, designed to illuminate the main thing being said. The effect of these two quotes is to offer an explanation about why it is that not everyone who hears the message of salvation accepts it. Jesus Himself had spoken on many occasions about this; it formed the subject matter of the parable of the sower in which seed was scattered, but not all of it grew to bear fruit, for example. In Paul's heart, however, the passages from Isaiah (Isaiah 52:7 and 53:1) came from that most heart rending of the 'servant songs' in Isaiah where the servant, who is the Messiah, is rejected by even his own people and yet acts for the redemption of all (see the whole of Isaiah 53). Paul therefore accepted, as Christ Himself accepted, that the Gospel message would not be received by all to whom it was preached, whether Jew or Gentile. The reasons for this rejection are not discussed here, but the rest of Scripture explains it by a combination of the presence of evil in the world and the free choice of all humanity whether to respond to God or not, as long as this world endures.

The rejection of the Gospel by the Jewish people

This thought about the rejection of the Gospel was an interruption in the previous section of his letter, but Paul could not escape its consequences. He was still deeply troubled by the issue of the rejection of God by his own people, the Jews. As if to illustrate what was in his mind, he gave four self explanatory quotes from the Old Testament which talk about the work of God to bring His message of salvation and redemption to the whole world.

The first quote Paul gave was from Psalm 19:4: 'yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.' This verse is part of a great psalm which declares the glory of God in Creation. From the beginning of the psalm, 'the heavens' declare God's work in the world, which is evident everywhere and without exception. Paul's point was that according to the Psalms, the evidence of God's work was there for all to see who would see it. He even implied by the use of this psalm that the Gospel itself was deeply rooted in the very make up of the world. God, as Creator, had placed within His creation the hope of perfection beyond the sinfulness and decay of the world people experienced, and this was not simply for the chosen people; it was universally available, even if it is not universally accepted!

Paul then turned to the Law and what was understood to be the writing of Moses. In Moses' last speech in Deuteronomy; he noted the rebellious nature of God's people who he had led for most of his life. He declared to them that if they did not choose to continue to be obedient, then God would reveal Himself to others, making Israel 'jealous' (see 10:19 and Deut 32:21) and this would make them angry. Paul gave this quote with great sadness, for he had experienced the consequences of such rebellion in his own life and had seen how destructive it was. He had been a jealous Jew, an opponent of the Gospel, and had turned away from this path (see his 'Damascus Road experience' – Acts 9). In his subsequent ministry he became an object of hatred and scorn for some of his fellow countrymen.

The significance of Isaiah's prophecies

The last two quotes in verses 20 and 21 come from Isaiah 65; verses 1 and 2 respectively. As so often in the New Testament, the prophet Isaiah provided the essential reference for those who sought to explain God's eternal plan of salvation! Paul recognised that the prophet was speaking about the day when God's redemption would become available to people 'who did not seek me', and those 'who did not ask for me' (10:20, see Isaiah 65:1). Coming at the end of his great prophetic work, Isaiah declared that the work of God was for all people, whether they sought Him or not, and he went on to explain that God's own people were a 'rebellious people' (verse 21, see Isaiah 65:2). In a strange way, the quote can either be seen as a statement of despair, that God should hold His hands out to His own people, but receive only rejection. On the other hand, Isaiah's words were written in a 'continuous' verb tense which indicated that God's hands would never stop being held out to God's people, even though they were rebellious. There was still hope!

So, on the one hand, Paul ends with the same note of despair with which he began the chapter; his own people having rejected their God, but at the very end there is this note of hope, for God was not yet finished with His rebellious people. In the next chapter, Paul went on to take up this very possibility, and suggest that God would have more for the people of Israel, resolving the question of how He would fulfil all the promises given in Old Testament times.

Application

The proclamation of the Gospel is a never ending task, and is the primary call for God's people on earth. Some would say that we should not put 'evangelism' above the worship of God or the service of others in any hierarchy of the obligations or duties of the church or of Christians. However, we worship Almighty God by doing His will, and His will is to extend His Kingdom, defeat all evil in this world and bring people into the Kingdom. Over the years, we have become accustomed to thinking of evangelism and the proclamation of the Gospel as one part of what the church does, but this is fundamentally unhelpful! If the Lord Jesus has saved us and lives by His Spirit within us, then what He wants to do in us is to reveal the 'good news' of this to others; that is the nature of our faith!

Christianity is not primarily a religion in the way that we define religions in the world today. It is not a life choice amongst others, or even a cultural issue, though most would like to tie Christianity down to one culture, and thereby fail to understand its nature and its influence within the world today. Christianity is the expression of the truth about the one and only God, found in Jesus Christ, and those who follow Jesus seek to live like Him not in a cultural sense, but by applying the essential truths of humanity to any and every expression of human life on the planet. Telling people about this truth is essential to what Christian discipleship is all about. This is our unmistakable conclusion.

The last part of this passage is also a reminder that even though people reject God, including His own people, the Jews, God does not turn His back on people. He stands as at the close of the great prophet Isaiah's book, with hands stretched open, awaiting a response (Isaiah 66). One day, all things will come to an end, but until then, we can never assume that God has turned his back on anyone, and in our evangelism, therefore, neither should we!

Questions (for use in groups)

1. How important is preaching to the life of the church? Could the church exist without preachers? Discuss this in your group.
2. How do we connect between the Gospel we hear preached and the words, life and death of Jesus Christ? How do we know that what we hear is true?
3. Are there any people God will not accept? Discuss whether it is possible to go beyond the saving love of Christ in this world.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The call to preach the Gospel is a serious one. Not everyone is able to speak out the Gospel 'from the pulpit', and those who are called need to be trained and assisted to develop the art of speaking so that the message will be heard. You may be one such preacher, and conscious of your obligations to pass on the truth about Christ. Other people pass on the Gospel in many other ways, for the most effective forms of evangelism are personal witness and faith, lived by people who are unashamed of their Lord. This is no less a high calling, for which we all benefit from help and training.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Think and pray about the call to preach. Have you ever felt that you should be preacher? Have you ever felt called to proclaim the Gospel in any other ways, such as by speaking to people privately, or perhaps in the family? Pray about these issues, because they will never go away!*
- *Pray for those who are called to preach the Gospel, especially those who do in fact preach Sunday by Sunday, but do not find it easy to preach the Gospel as defined here in Romans. Pray that God's people will accept the importance of God's message and the need for it to be communicated to the world.*

Final Prayer

Call each of us, Lord Jesus, according to Your plans for the world and for the future. May we be prepared to play our part in whatever way you require of us, so that Your Gospel may be proclaimed throughout the world, and to Your glory! Thanks be to God; AMEN
