

+ Romans 10:13-17 + I Hear the Savior Calling + 5th Sunday after the Epiphany + 8 February 2015 +

It always amazes me when I open my office door on a Sunday morning and see you sitting here getting ready for worship. I love seeing your smiling faces and joining you in worship week in and week out, but that's not the reason why I'm so amazed. The truth is, like many of the people in your neighborhood, you could come up with all kinds of excuses why you don't need to be here on a snowy Sunday morning. Yet you are and the reason why you're here is pretty amazing. Jesus called you through his Gospel shared by people in your life so now you're here. It's a miracle of grace!

The last couple weeks we've been taking a closer look at how Jesus unexpectedly changed your life and mine through his Gospel, his Word shared by parents, a relative, a friend, a co-worker, a classmate, a pastor. Now this morning the Apostle Paul takes us behind the scenes of your story and mine to show us why it's amazing that Jesus called each of us to faith in him through his saving Gospel. At the same time, Paul encourages us to hear the Savior's call to take that Gospel to other people in our lives.

Now before we do that, I'm going to ask you to do something unpleasant. Imagine for a moment what your life would be like right now if no one had ever told you about Jesus—not your parents, not a relative, not a friend, not a co-worker or classmate, not a neighbor, not even a pastor. Imagine that Jesus' call to share the Gospel with you was simply ignored or rejected or put off for a later time that never happened—and you never found out about Jesus. You never learned about God's love for you that sent a Savior to pay for the guilt of your sins and to give you eternal life.

So what would your life look like now? Would it be vastly different or would it look surprisingly similar? Knowing how Jesus has impacted your life, if he was never in your life, would you have old or present guilt crushing your heart? Would you have grief eating away at your soul with loss and heartache? Would worry or restlessness be robbing you of any sense of lasting peace? Would you be a hardened skeptic, a self-centered pagan, or simply a guilty sinner trying to make up for it every day with meager acts of kindness? What would your life be like without Jesus?

It might be successful. It might be full of the things and people of this life. It may even be mostly pleasant, but what about the end? It would end in an awful way being separated from God's merciful love forever in hell.

You can stop imagining. Now Jesus hasn't made your life free of the unpleasant or painful. As long as we're sinful human beings living in a sinful world, that shouldn't surprise us, but he has changed our lives by bringing his good news into our lives. You can be assured that what the prophet Joel once wrote is true for you. **"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."** Through the Gospel, the Lord of grace has saved you.

Yet what's most amazing is how you got to that point. The Apostle Paul pulls back the curtain. He shows us how God in his mercy had to guide the entire sequence of events that Jesus used to call you to faith in him through the Gospel. Paul asks a series of four questions that all had to be answered for you to become a believer **"who calls on the name of the Lord."**

"How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?" To call on the name of the Lord you have to actually trust and believe in him. On your own, you can't and won't. You can't call on the name of the Lord without saving faith in him. **"And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?"** That goes back to that unpleasant scenario that I had you imagine. If you had not heard about Jesus as your Savior, you would not have come to faith in him. You couldn't. Nothing inside of you could or would make that happen. Paul later explains, **"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ."** At some point in your life, the Lord had to bring you into contact with the hearing of his Word.

"And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?" Someone in your life had to tell you about Jesus your Savior for you to hear that good news and come to faith in Jesus. Someone had to take that opportunity to share with you the forgiveness, the peace, the love of Christ your Savior—news you can't and won't hear anywhere else.

"And how can they preach unless they are sent?" Someone had to answer the Savior's call to share the Gospel with you. Now that doesn't mean that Jesus appeared to them in a dream at night, a vision during the

day, or during a bout of indigestion. Through his Word, Jesus calls people like us to go with the Gospel to the people in our lives, to **“preach the good news to all creation”** (Mark 16:15), to **“make disciples of all nations”** (Matthew 28:19), to **“give the reason for the hope that we have”** (1 Peter 3:15) so others can have that same hope.

Jesus used someone to do that for you! Maybe it was your parents. Maybe it was a relative or a friend or a classmate or a neighbor. Maybe it was a pastor who was called to proclaim the message of God’s love in Christ to you. After all, that is one of the main reasons why the Lord established the public ministry—for pastors and teachers to faithfully proclaim the good news of God’s love to you and many others. We shudder to imagine how different our lives would be if the Lord had not provided those people to answer his call to share that Gospel with us.

Paul adds to that final question a quote from the prophet Isaiah. **“As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”** This really has nothing to do with how attractive or well-formed the feet of messengers might be. I would guess that the feet of most of those who shared the good news of Jesus with you weren’t necessarily the kind of feet you’d see in foot ads. So there has to be more to that word **“beautiful.”**

When someone brings you good news, it fills you with joy, relief, excitement, even hope. You’re so happy to receive such good news—a child is born, a surgery was successful, a diagnosis is negative, a building will be built. If you’ve been mired in worry, flirting with despair, or lost in your own self-centeredness, the timing couldn’t be better. In a sense, the feet of those who bring good news couldn’t have arrived at a better, more perfect time than they did for you in your life.

Couldn’t the same be said of those who brought the good news of Jesus into your life? Isn’t it true that the feet of those who brought you the good news of Jesus couldn’t have arrived at a better, more perfect time in your life? Pretty amazing, isn’t it? That messenger or those messengers of God’s good news of Jesus came exactly when God wanted them to come into your life.

They came with the most beautiful news of all, the news of a Savior who took your old or present guilt on his own shoulders on a cross, who dried your tears with the resurrection comfort that only he can give, who brought peace to your soul and purpose to your life with your eyes now fixed on him and the life to come, who turned you away from the road to hell to the path to heaven—and it was God who accomplished it all. He sent out his Gospel. He provided the messenger(s). He provided the opportunity for you to hear it, and he broke through your hardened heart so you’d believe it. Now you call **“on the name of the Lord”** in the full assurance that you **“will be saved.”**

As you consider how amazing God in his mercy has been to you, perhaps you might see a problem. The Apostle himself saw it. **“But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’”** It’s true. Not everyone listens when they hear the good news of Jesus. In fact, many reject that message. They don’t have time for it. It sounds too easy. They don’t want to follow a God who came to save 2,000 years ago. They don’t want that Gospel to take over their lives. They may want to put it off until they’re old and need it since they don’t see the need for Jesus or his good news in their lives right now.

It’s easy to take that personally. It’s easy to throw up your hands in frustration when you try to tell someone about Jesus and they don’t want to listen. Then you start doubting. “Maybe I’m really not good at this. So maybe I shouldn’t talk about Jesus anymore.” You doubt the ability of God and his Word to transform hearts and change minds. You wonder if the effort is really worth it when so many could care less what you have to say about Jesus. You wonder if God really does keep his promise that people who hear the good news of Jesus do come to faith in him and are saved. So you start avoiding or putting off opportunities to talk about Jesus with others.

Yet the Lord has something to say about that—really a promise that it’s not about you or about how you tell someone about Jesus. No, it’s about his Word and the ability of his Word to create faith in the stony soil of unbelieving human hearts. **“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”** Jesus simply calls you to be his messenger with that saving Gospel message.

When you stop and think about it, it's pretty amazing that you're here today. God arranged all things to bring you here. He made the good news of salvation known and called messengers with timely, "**beautiful**" feet to tell you about Jesus your Savior. Then through that good news, he created life in your dead heart, opened your blind eyes, and rescued you from death.

Now the Savior calls you to be his messenger—to take the good news of his salvation to people in your life and to people who will come into your life. For our young people, perhaps the Lord can use you to serve him as a pastor or teacher taking his Gospel to others as his called messengers. For all of us, keep in mind that Jesus doesn't ask you to argue people into heaven. He doesn't ask you to present complex theological discourses to convince people to believe. He simply asks you to sow the seed of his Gospel and to trust him to grow it. So many need what Jesus did for you!

So do you hear the Savior calling? He has work for you to do. Let's see what our God and his Word can do when we answer his call to go. Amen.