

Faith Comes from Hearing the Word of God

Isaiah 6:8-10; Romans 10:1-21

By Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • October 3, 2021 (BSCC)

Dear Congregation of Christ: One of the most popular songs written by Paul Simon is “The Sounds of Silence.” In this song are the mysterious words, “People talking without speaking / People hearing without listening / People writing songs that voices never shared.” Even the title is somewhat mysterious. We sometimes call these words “paradoxes” or “oxymorons.” His words may be conveying the message that our conversations are meaningless, uninteresting, and unimportant. So, in many conversations, people think they are talking to each other, but they’re actually *past* each other. There is monologue, not dialogue, especially about politics these days. Everyone has something “important” to say, and what others have to say are not. Facebook, Twitter and all other social media have aggravated this “hearing without listening.”

Could it be that Paul Simon derived these words from Isaiah 6:9–10, where the Lord commissioned the prophet to tell the Israelites, *“Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.” Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”*

We have learned from the last few Sundays that Paul was trying to explain to his readers why his own people, the Jews, who were God’s chosen people, were not being saved. Has God’s covenant promises to their forefathers Abraham, Moses and David failed? In our text today, in verses 1-4, Paul begins by saying that his heart’s desire and prayer is for the salvation of the Jews. They have a zeal for God, but they lack knowledge of how they are to be righteous before God. They believed the bad news that righteousness could be attained by obeying the Law of Moses.

The Jews did not believe the good news from the Apostle Paul that their salvation is through faith alone in Christ alone and his perfect righteousness. They heard and saw Christ preached, but did not understand because they were blind and had hard hearts. But there is also good news. Moses and Isaiah prophesied that another people would believe the good news of salvation in Christ. These are not Jews, but Gentiles who were formerly not God’s people.

So our theme is, **Faith Comes from Hearing the Word of God**, under two headings.

The Word of Faith is Near You

In verses 5-13, Paul writes that salvation is through faith, because righteousness is given by God to everyone who believes. Righteousness is the only way by which everyone can have a saving relationship with God.

Paul says that his fellow Jews should have known this because Moses wrote that God himself commanded the Jews in Leviticus 18:5, *“You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them.”* What God is telling them is that life with God can only be attained if a person obeys God’s laws. But the big problem is this: is there any way anyone can obey God’s laws fully, not violating even one law? Obviously not, because Paul points out in Romans 3:23,

“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” Therefore, if a person depends on obedience to God’s laws for salvation, then he is hopeless. This is why Paul says in Galatians 3:10–12,

“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ But the law is not of faith, rather ‘The one who does them shall live by them.’”

Not only is such a person hopeless, but he is cursed by God, because he is a sinner who can never attain perfect righteousness. How then can a person be saved? Salvation is given to him only by faith in Christ, who obeyed God’s laws perfectly, earning the perfect righteousness that God requires of us. So our saving righteousness comes not from our own obedience—this is utterly impossible—but from the perfect obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ. How does a person attain this righteousness? By faith alone in Christ alone. This is the only hope of salvation for everyone in the whole world, Jews or Gentiles. This is why Jesus is also the Savior of the world.

Because salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, and not by our own obedience to God’s laws, there is nothing else we have to do to be saved. We do not have to do the impossible, such as going up to heaven or to down to the realm of the dead to find Christ. He is near us—always accessible—through his word, the Holy Scriptures. This is why Paul says, *“The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” ... 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*” (verses 8-9).

Here, Paul quotes Moses in Deuteronomy 30:11-14, where God tells the Israelites that God’s word is not too hard for them or too far from them. They don’t have to go to heaven or go to the depths of the sea to find him. The Lord encouraged them, *“But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it”* (verse 14). The word is very near them, because if it is in their mouth and heart, they can hear and obey it. In the same way, Paul tells the Jews, *“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”* (Rom 10:9). For most Jews, this is a most difficult command. They would never, ever believe and confess that Jesus is Lord and God, the Messiah. Today, most of them are still waiting for their Messiah. On top of this unbelief, they would never, ever believe that Jesus rose from the dead.

Even worse than these unbelieving Jews are unbelieving people in Christian churches. They acknowledge that Jesus is their Savior, but do not believe that he taught and did all the things attributed to him in the Scriptures. They do not believe in his virgin birth, his sinless life, his miracles, and his resurrection. If there are some teachings that they disagree with, then they are not Jesus’ words. If he taught against homosexuality, divorce for any reason, abortion, murder, disobeying authority, and lying, then those are not Jesus’ teachings. You can give them numerous Scripture passages and sound interpretation about homosexuality and abortion as heinous sins, but they will discount it, diminish it, put their own spin on it, or say outright that the Bible is wrong. They pick and choose what to believe in the Scriptures. You will most likely talking past them, a waste of time, effort and words, unless the Spirit works in their rebellious hearts.

Another major argument against the true Christian religion is its exclusivity: that Jesus is the only Savior, no one else and no other way. Jesus is the only Way, the only Truth, and the only Life. This is a really difficult—if not impossible—doctrine to teach to our pluralistic culture. If you discuss this with such a person, they will condemn you as intolerant, bigoted, prejudiced, and of course, racist. But think of this, if you are one of these skeptics: God sent his beloved Son down to earth to assume human flesh and blood, live as a Jew, be crucified as a cursed man, and be raised from the dead, to save all his chosen ones. Imagine this: if there was another way of salvation, then why would God do this, and why would his Son willingly and shamefully sacrifice himself? If Muslims can be saved by Muhammad, Hindus by Krishna, Buddhists by Brahmas, and all other religious cults by another person or way, then Jesus' sacrifice is useless, illogical and ludicrous. Still, liberals and liberal churches believe this nonsense.

So Paul says in verses 9 and 10 that a person with a believing heart and confessing mouth is saved. Saving faith is within a person's mind, heart and soul, and is demonstrated by the person publicly confessing or professing that Jesus is Lord and was raised from the grave. There are many who have publicly professed their faith in Jesus in church, but their faith is really only outward, and not in their hearts and minds. In our church, we baptize infants and little children of professing members, and then starting in their pre-teen years, they can present themselves to the church to make a profession of faith. One of the vows they would have to answer, "I do," before God and his holy church is, "Do you declare that you love the Lord, and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve Him according to His Word, to forsake the world, to put to death your old nature, and to lead a godly life?" And as long as they continue in this life of faith, they are considered as faithful members of God's household.

And on Judgment Day, "*everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame*" (verse 11). Those who reject, twist, ridicule and spite Christ and his word will be shamed forever when they are sent to hell. In contrast, "*everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*" Those who give honor, glorify, praise and worship him will enjoy all the rich blessings of heaven forever.

Friends, the true word of God is near you. It is in your pew Bibles, in your homes, in your cell phones and laptops, in bookstores, and on TV and radio. It is everywhere. Take advantage of it, and you will be saved, and your souls will be nourished by it.

Faith Comes from Hearing and Understanding the Word of God

But then, in verse 18, Paul again asks, "*Have they not heard*" the good news of God's word? Who are "they"? "They" are the Jews, his countrymen. And Paul says they have heard, quoting Psalm 19:4, where the psalmist says that the voice of the heavens created by God "*has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.*" The apostle is not referring only to God revealing himself through all nature, but also through Jesus his Son whose gospel has been preached to the whole world. With "the ends of the world," he is referring to the Roman world. All the apostles have gone to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the whole Roman empire preaching the gospel.

As Paul wrestles with the salvation of the Jews, he then asks, “*Did Israel not understand?*” If they have heard the gospel, why are they not being saved? He again explains from Moses and Isaiah. In verse 19, he quotes God’s word to Israel in Deuteronomy 32:21, “*I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a foolish nation I will make you angry.*” The people who were not God’s people will become God’s people. These people were formerly “fools” who said there is no God or worshiped other gods (Psa 14:1). The gospel was foolishness to them (1 Cor 1:18, 23; 2:14).

Who are the people of this “foolish nation”? These are Gentiles whom God is saving from their sins. The apostle Peter declares the very same news in 1 Peter 2:9–10. He calls non-Jews as if they were God’s chosen people Israel, “*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession... Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people.*” Gentiles like us have been added to a remnant of Jews to become one people, one nation in God’s household.

When Jews see this work of God among non-Jews, whom they consider unclean, foolish, second-class human beings, and not deserving of God’s saving mercy, they would be jealous and angry at God. Jonah is the prime example of this jealousy and anger. He did not want to preach the gospel to wicked pagan in Nineveh, because they were not members of God’s people. Even the Apostle Peter was guilty of not wanting to eat together with non-Jews who had become Christians. He was rebuked by his fellow-apostle Paul and later repented of his sin.

Jesus commissioned his twelve apostles first to preach the gospel to all the nations. In verses 14-15, Paul asks a chain of rhetorical questions about how a person comes to Christ in faith. In verse 13, he says, “*For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*” But then, “*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? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?*” The chain of saving faith is this: the apostles and ministers of the church are sent by Christ; they preach the gospel to everyone; those who hear and understand believe; and finally, they call on the name of the Lord to be saved.

Then, Paul quotes the Lord’s word to Israel in Isaiah 65:1, “*I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.*” Gentiles who were not seeking God found God. And God revealed himself to Gentiles who were not asking for him. This is another paradox: Jews who were seeking God did not find him; Gentiles who were not seeking God found him.

Beloved brothers and sisters, Paul concludes, “*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*” Faith comes from preaching the gospel, not from happy-clappy songs, drama, inspirational talks, and other forms of entertaining the goats. Faith comes from preaching the gospel to the sheep.

Therefore, let us not be jealous that most churches around us have entertainment for worship and are much bigger than us. True believers will only be a small remnant out of all who claim to be Christians. Jesus himself said, “*Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few*” (Matt 7:13-14).