Are You Good Enough to Get into Heaven?
Series: Righteousness Revealed
Romans 9:30-10:21
Chadron Bible Church

According to Pew Research, approximately 75% of Americans believe in heaven and that they will go there after they die. This is a figure that has remained stable over the years and across various surveys. If you were to ask the average person on the street, that question, I think you would find similar results.

Actually there is an evangelist on YouTube that does just that. He will go around in the public, in southern California, and ask people questions like, "Where do you think you will go when you die?" From what I've seen, most of them assume they are going to heaven. When he asks them why they think they will go to heaven, most of them say things like, "Well, I'm a pretty good person. I've never murdered anyone. And I try to keep the Ten Commandments." Because that is such a **common mindset** and way of thinking, I imagine we have some individuals here this morning who are thinking the same way. Thinking that God is going to weigh your good deeds against your bad deeds and hopefully you good outweighs your bad and you'll get in. Or thinking that God is going to compare you with the next guy who is in line in front of you when he dies who did time behind bars, and hopefully God is in a good mood when He gets to you and let's you in. What if I told you that **the Bible teaches the exact opposite**? That you cannot get into heaven by being good enough? That **you'd be better off trying to jump across the Grand Canyon than to get into heaven** ***by being good enough or doing enough religious things. What are you relying on to get you into heaven?***

That's what we want to talk about this morning as we resume our drive through Romans. We are in Romans 11 and Paul is explaining how the Jews, some of the most religious people in the world, have presently been set aside by God. They were **all about keeping God's Law** and the **Ten Commandments** and **trying to be good enough**, but they found themselves **rejected**. This left many Christians in Paul's day were scratching their heads. The churches were predominantly Gentile (non-Jew) and very few Jews were coming to Christ. God had made many promises to Israel in the OT, and it seems like those promises have fallen flat. That they weren't kept. Many of the Jews weren't coming to Christ. So the question is, **How can we expect God to keep His promises to us if He didn't keep His promises to Israel.** So that's why Israel takes up such a significant portion of teaching in Romans 9-11.

Romans 9: Israel in the past: selected. Standpoint of divine sovereignty.
Romans 10: Israel in the present: rejected. Set aside. Standpoint of responsibility.
Romans 11: Israel in the future: accepted.

Remember when we talk about Israel's rejection, we're <u>not</u> talking about a complete or final rejection, but a temporary and partial rejection. **Israel's rejection is partial and temporary. They've been set aside. Paul dealt with Israel's rejection from the <u>standpoint of divine</u>**

sovereignty in chapter 9 and now he'll deal with it from the standpoint of human responsibility.

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.

So the theme of Romans is **righteousness revealed**. In Romans 1-3, Paul the unrighteousness of man. Man is unrighteous. It doesn't if you are a rebellious atheist, a moralistic do-gooder (you try really hard to be a good person), or a religious Jew who tries his best to keep the Law & the Ten Commandments, **every man is an unrighteous sinner**. Every man's **natural standing before God is unrighteous**. Guilty. Worthy of God's wrath and condemnation.

This is man's dilemma before God. It raises then, the question: how can man be made right before God? How can man go from unrighteous to righteous? From guilty to being cleared of the charges? Wrath to mercy? How can we obtain a perfectly righteous standing before God? That's the question. And Paul has answered this question before, but now with the subject of Israel at hand specifically.

Paul says Israel attempted to pursue this righteous standing before God by works of the law. They looked to the Law of God, Moses's writing and the 10 Commandments, as a sort of checklist by which if they kept it perfectly, they would be good enough. Righteous enough.

Reason 1: Israel pursued r'ness by religious rule-keeping.

Think of it like a religious piggy bank.
I do a religious work. I get a little righteous token to put in my piggy bank account.
I go to synagogue. Plink! A token of righteousness in my piggy bank.
I give God some of my money. Plink! More righteousness.
I offer a sacrifice. Plink!
I do a good deed. Plink!
I don't work on the Sabbath. Plink! More righteousness.

So at the end of their life, they are going to present this account of righteous tokens to God and hopefully God will be pleased and let them into heaven the Messiah would come save them.

Ironic Race
So the Gentiles (non-Jews), who **did not *pursue* righteousness**, did not have the Law, and yet they still found it, while the Jews who are pursuing righteousness didn't. It's a picture of an ironic race. The Jews were running hard, working up a sweat, striving for the goal of righteousness, but don't win. The Gentiles are not working hard, barely even thinking about it, and yet they win. It's incredibly ironic. **Gentiles obtain r'ness by faith. Jews pursue, but do not obtain r'ness, by religious works. So at the end of the day…**

Self-Righteousness is <u>Self</u>-<u>Defeating</u>.

By trying to produce a righteousness of your own, being self-righteous, you're actually working **against yourself**. You're working **against the message of the gospel**. This is why so many evangelical churches like our own will make the statement: "we are not religious." We're trying to make it clear that you cannot get to heaven or find life with God simply by doing religious things. It doesn't work that way. In fact, it's exactly the opposite.

Reason 2: Israel <u>stumbled</u> over the stone of Christ.

They [Israel] *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."*

Paul pictures Israel here like a runner, running toward the finish line. They are running hard after righteousness but stumble over, trip over, a rock in the track. A stone they didn't see coming. They **stumble over Jesus** because Jesus death and resurrection says He paid it all. You are not righteous. You can't be on your own. They take offense at that message they don't want Jesus to do it for them. They want to make it on their own. **They can't get past all the commands in the Law to see God's grace apart from it.**

Reason 3: Israel ignored the <u>accessibility</u> of r'ness.

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

Can I just say right away, this is why we're a Bible church? This is why we take knowledge of the Bible seriously? Because if we don't, as I've said, we will either be a country club or social club, or worse, religious. Zeal for God without knowledge of the Bible is a spiritual disaster. Paul understands that about Israel and expresses, again, like he did at the beginning of chapter 9, his compassion for his Jewish brethren. How ironic to be zealous for God and still not have Him because they're so concerned about the Law.

Paul says Christ is the **end of the Law** for righteousness to everyone who believes. The word for **end** is the Greek word ***telos***, and it can mean **termination** or **goal**. Based on the way Paul speaks of the Law in Romans and Galatians, I think it can have both meanings. The **era of the Law has come to an end** with the first coming of Christ, but also, **Jesus is the goal** of the Law. When you believe in Jesus, the Law has done what it was designed to do in your life: **point you to Jesus**. Galatians 4 he calls it **a tutor the lead us to Christ**. In Christ, you are **dead to the Law**.

The Law <u>leads</u> to the Lord Jesus.

As we've discussed, the Law has a **two-fold purpose**. It **reveals God's righteous character**. There is one God. He doesn't lie. He doesn't steal. He is good. He is holy. But in doing so, the Law also **reveals man's unrighteous character**.

Mirror: In that sense, it acts like a **mirror**. We may feel righteous and think of ourselves as righteous, but when we look into the mirror of God's Law, we see how dirty we really are. I have lied. I have coveted.

X-Ray: It's like an x-ray machine. The Law scans you and reveals your faults. But it can't fix you any more than an x-ray machine can fix you. The Law isn't the solution or final answer.

In fact, quite the opposite, Paul explained in Romans 7 that when you try to keep the Law, it just stirs up **more lawlessness** within you. If I say to myself, "I won't covet." I start coveting. If I say to you, "Don't think about C-hill," you're thinking, "I think I'll climb C-hill later."

People who are going to claim their keeping of the Ten Commandments as their way to get into heaven, are **misunderstanding the purpose of the Law**. It wasn't for you to keep so that through keeping it you could get to heaven. It was to reveal your unr'ess so that by faith, you would look to God's mercy in Christ. So we would say, Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.

5 For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness.

So this is a Jewish slogan and as one man said, this is a **very sobering statement**. Why? Because if you want to live by the Law, at all, **you'd better keep it perfectly**. You'd better live by it. The problem is no one can. We've all broken it. But that doesn't stop some people from trying.

Most people will cherry-pick the Law. They pick from the Law what they want. Or they divide the Law up three ways and then pick certain laws out of it to live by. Paul never treats the Law that way. It's all or nothing. James says if you stumble at one point, you've broken the whole thing.

Trying to attain righteousness by keeping the law is like trying to jump across the Grand Canyon by trying harder. You may get a little further than the next guy, but no one can do it. The good news—the Gospel—is that there is another way. An accessible way to attain righteousness.

*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.*

So in this passage, Paul likens Christ to the new Word of God. Just like God came down and made the Law known, so Christ, the final Word, came down. Righteousness by faith isn't something you have to strive after. It isn't something hard to reach or attain. It's not far out. It's accessible. You don't have to work your way to Christ in heaven. You don't have to descend to the lowest parts of the earth. God had already done that in Christ. Christ came down, the **incarnation** and His death. And He came up, the **resurrection**. In essence, Paul is saying the work has already been done. The race has already been run. The ground has already been covered.

He says the word of faith that he preached and we preach, is **near you** and **in you**. The Jews were so focused on reaching something **externally**. But the gospel is an **internal** message. It's accessible through simple **hearing, not doing**. **Believing, not striving.** This is hard for religious man, who wants so bad to do something, to understand. He did it all.

Reason 4: Israel ignored the <u>availability</u> r'ness. To all.

A lot of Jews rejected the message of Jesus because they believed only Jews could be saved or that Gentiles had to keep the Law to be saved. Paul addresses that hurdle as well.

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."

Paul is pointing to the Scriptures and saying, if Jesus is Lord (God), then He can be **Lord of the Gentiles** too. All who call on Him will be saved, not just the Jews.

The **openness of the invitation** is emphasized by the used of the word **whoever**. **Whoever believes**. **Whoever will call on Jesus**. We all get into heaven the same way. This brings up the issue of man's responsibility doesn't it? Last week we saw God's choosing. This week we see man's choosing. We don't have to worry about who's chosen or not. We need to think about what we're choosing to trust in: our own r'ness or Jesus's perfect r'ness through faith in Him?

14 How then will they call on Him in 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 is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!"

Paul quotes Isaiah which **describes messengers running** to announce to God's people that He is about to deliver them from exile in Babylon. **Paul applies the quotation to preachers of the gospel** who proclaim freedom from sin and death. It's talking about any Christian proclaiming the gospel—not just vocational preachers—whether you're proclaiming it to a friend or to a neighbor or somebody at the coffee shop, or around the world. The sequence is clear. People need to hear the gospel to understand it and believe it. Someone needs to share the gospel with them. There's a lot to learn here about sharing our faith. This is the pattern to lead someone to

salvation from a human standpoint. A proclaimer is sent to them. They hear. They understand. They believe or don't believe. We have the responsibility to go and share the message. Quite often you hear this at missions conferences. While it is true, in this context, the point is that **Israel has heard and did not believe**. Remember that's the main point. Messengers have been sent. They've proclaimed the good news. Who has believed among Israel? No one.

Reason 5: Israel <u>willfully</u> <u>rejected</u> r'ness by faith in Christ.

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 ends 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."

So Isreal can't plead ignorance. They have heard. They have understood. From a human standpoint, they are rejected because they willfully choose to reject the gospel of Jesus. They continue to refuse to respond to God's provision for them in Jesus and continue to try and work their way to God. And Paul starts to bring up the conversation about Gentiles and how God would make **Israel jealous** by saving people who were not Jewish. God would **provoke them back to faith** by means of blessing the Gentiles in their place. More on that in Romans 11.

Righteousness is obtained by <u>relying</u> on Jesus, not religious rule-keeping.

In conclusion, we find ourselves faced with the same destiny-defining choice: Are you going to try to be right with God by being good enough? Trusting your own righteousness? Or will you believe the good news that Jesus died for your sins so that you could be granted His righteousness? You hear it. You understand it. But do you believe it? If so, call out to Him this morning in your heart. And then, if you don't mind, would you share that with someone here so we can celebrate with you?