

## **Romans 10:5-15**

*Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.” But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say?*

*“The word is near you,  
on your lips and in your heart”*

*(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*

*But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”*

## **Matthew 14:22-33**

*Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”*

*Peter answered him, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”*

I have a story for you. There was a man who was offered a job in Spain. It would be a yearlong assignment for the company that he worked for and it would come with a large bonus. After some consideration, he decided to accept the position even though it would take him away from his girlfriend of many years. They had decided together that when he returned they would get married and put the bonus money towards a house in which to start their life together.

Well, as the weeks went by, she began to express her doubts that he was being faithful to her. After all there were many beautiful girls in Spain she thought, and a year was a long time. He wrote back to her and told her that he was being faithful. He admitted though, in his letter, that Spain was filled indeed with beautiful women and that, at times, he had been tempted. But he assured her that he would fight the temptation and be true to her.

A week later a package arrived for him in Spain. In it was a harmonica and a note. The note said, "I am sending this to you so you have something to take your mind off all those girls."

Well, the year came to an end and he returned home. His girl was waiting for him at the airport and he came running to her, arms outstretched, with a big smile on his face. As he was almost there to embrace her, she stuck out her hand to stop him. "Hold on there a minute, Bucko! First, I want to hear you play that harmonica!"

You know, I wonder whether God is going to be looking for us to play the harmonica. Now, I know that that is a bit of an oversimplification of things. Stories often are. I mean, certainly, the girl in our story didn't believe that playing the harmonica was necessary for a faithful relationship or a good marriage. But it was a sign to her that he was not giving into the temptation he found in Spain. And certainly with God we are reconciled through faith, not works. But, I can't help but wonder what sign God will be looking for? I also wonder what evidence others are looking for in us?

Hear again what Paul had to say about this when he wrote his letter to the church in Rome, explaining the faith and what a faithful life required of them. "...if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." James put it differently, maybe more directly, "Faith without works is dead", meaning that faith without some evidence of that faith in your life, calls into question the faith itself.

~~Let's pretend for a second. Let's pretend that God cannot see our hearts. What if God needed the~~ testimony of others in order to know whether you believed, or not. And what if God decided to use our judicial system to decide whether we were followers of Christ? As the old saying goes, "If Christianity became illegal and you were put on trial, would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

That really is a question that stops us in our tracks, or, at least, it should. That is what it is meant to do. Would there be enough evidence to convict us? Would there be enough evidence to convict me, I would need to ask. And even more than that, would I even let it come to a public trial without plea bargaining out of the charge with the prosecutor in order to escape a potential emotional or physical penalty?

Christian author Pete Rollins in an oddly entitled book "The Orthodox Heretic" wrote a reflection on just this scenario. His parable began like you might expect. In a world where Christianity had been outlawed a person is arrested. He is brought before the magistrate and the evidence is rolled out. This, however, is where the typical expected story takes a bit of a turn. The prosecutor presents a long stream of evidence. Church attendance, speaking at religious events, attending church dinners. In his home, they found a bookshelf full of religious books all with his name in them. They found worship CDs and Christian artifacts neatly displayed under glass on shelves on either side of the fireplace. Finally, they pull out his well-worn bible, with underlined passages and notes in the margin. The defendant just looked on, knowing that this is not looking good for him.

In the end the judge comes out and pronounces his verdict...Not Guilty!

At first, the person in the story is surprised and relieved, but quickly he becomes angry. He turns to the judge, "What do you mean 'Not Guilty?'"

The judge explained that all that the evidence suggests is that he was simply interested in a spiritual topic. Maybe even very interested to the point of obsession, maybe even to the point of convincing yourself that it might actually be true. "But," the Judge continued, "this foolishness is not enough to convict you in a court of law. The court is indifferent to your Bible reading and your church attendance. Go ahead. Continue to develop your theology and use it to paint pictures of love and write poems to likeminded people. We have no interest in armchair artists who spend their time painting pictures of some hoped for better world. We exist only for those who would lay down that brush, and even their lives, in a Christlike manner to actually create that better world. So, until you live as Christ and his followers did, until you challenge our system and become a thorn in our side, until then, my friend, you are no enemy of ours. Case dismissed!"

So, what is God looking for from us? How about this? If you truly believe in your heart, if you really accept for your life, the truth that God raised Jesus, His Son, from death back into life, and if are willing to take that truth to an unbelieving world with your own lips in word and action, if you are willing to actually tell people that Jesus is Lord so that they and the world in which we live would be transformed, come what may to you personally, then you will be held to be reunited, reconciled, with God, Himself, and His plan for the world.

And just in case there is any confusion of what "confess with your lips" means, Paul continues in his letter. He talks about those who have not yet found belief in the fact that Christ rose from the dead for us, and he asks a very clear question. And I paraphrase a bit... If we are going to live out authentic Christians lives, we need to believe in and then call on Christ... and if others need to also recognize, and believe, and call on Christ for themselves, how are these people going to call on someone in whom they don't believe? And how are they going to come to belief in someone who they have never heard of? And how are they going to hear about this Risen Savior, if the people who do believe do not proclaim him? And how is Christ going to be proclaimed, if disciples are not made, nor encouraged, nor equipped, nor sustained by and in the church so that they can be sent to those who need to hear?

What will God be looking for from us? I think that He will be looking for beautiful music. And what is the beautiful music he is looking in our lives? What beautiful water is he looking for our feet to be upon? Scripture puts it like this: "One of the most beautiful things in God's creation are the feet of those who bring Good News."

God is calling each one of us to be found guilty within our world, without question, of that kind of beauty.

Amen.