

Romans Summary
Week 18, Wednesday February 1, 2017
Romans 10:1-21

Having established Israel's predicament Paul now prays for his people and it's simple; that they would be saved. Israel isn't bad, they are in fact, zealous for God. The problem is that their zealotry is a part from knowledge. This was Paul's own description prior to meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus. What don't they know? God's righteousness.

God's righteousness is now shorthand for everything Paul has said about God's righteousness in the actions of Jesus' death and resurrection. Without this key knowledge they are seeking to establish a righteousness of their own. This is works as in trying to earn their own salvation, but trying to keep the people of God a Jew only thing. Remember that God's righteousness is Jew plus Gentile family of Abraham.

This might need some further explaining so Paul does. Paul has been telling Israel's story from Abraham to exodus and from exile to Messiah. He now summarizes that Messiah is the goal of the Torah — Jesus is where the whole Israel story has been going. As a result, there is now a righteousness to everyone — Jew and Gentile — who believes.

But, from a Jewish point of view this seems strange, doesn't the Torah envision a Jewish people? Yes, at the beginning of the Torah it did. But we have moved into the point of the story to exile. In the exile things look different. So Paul goes to Moses, to an exile passage. In Deuteronomy there are blessings and curses outlined, with the final curse being exile — removal from the land.

It seems to be Moses' assumption that Israel will indeed experience these curses, but then there will be a new righteousness to follow the judgment of exile. Then Israel will experience a righteousness which will allow them to live. In Deuteronomy 30 Moses says this righteousness is based on faith — Paul has been describing a righteousness based on faith — the promise is that the word is in your mouth and heart.

Moses may not have known it at the time but this is the word about the Messiah who went down (death) and came up (resurrection). And that faith is indeed expressed in word and heart. The Christian, as part of a baptismal rite, confesses with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and they believe in their heart that God raised Jesus from the dead. This is the fulfillment then of Moses' return from exile or salvation which Paul is praying for his fellows.

Paul goes on to make the point that this faith is not ethnically bound. It is a word of faith open to all, so he can then say whoever believes will not be disappointed which is an Isaiah quote who is an exilic prophet. Paul drives the point home by noting that because there is only one God (Jewish Monotheism) there can only be one people — both Jew and Gentile. Paul caps this off with the Joel 2 quote that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

In verse 8 Paul made the point that the word of faith was the word he preaches, so now he draws out the logic. If his prayer is for his people to be saved — and it is — then they have to call on the name of the Lord, which is now redefined by Jesus the Messiah. They have to believe this word and then call on this name, but they can't do that if they haven't heard of him and they can't hear of him if no one is sent to preach or proclaim.

This is still part of the conversation of Israel coming out of exile. Isaiah says how beautiful the feet are of the ones who bring the message of Good News. So, Paul sees his own work as an apostle — a sent one — as a part of how God will bring salvation to his people.

All this means that Israel is aware from her Scriptures that returning from exile involves the inclusion of the Gentiles in to the people of God. So it is particularly sad when she stays aloof from salvation.

Now, while it's a great thing that the Gentiles have come in, it doesn't mean that every Gentile has come in. Not all Gentiles have come in. In fact, more have not come in than have come in. The point is that this word promised to Israel, now revealed as the word of Christ, is universal — for both Jew and Gentile — and has reached everyone. In short, this 'new' version of Torah — this word of Christ — has gone out and Gentiles have come in.

Can Israel claim ignorance to this coming in of the Gentiles? No. Moses told them that God will make Israel jealous by the Gentiles — this is Paul reading the exodus story through the lens of the exile. Then Isaiah says the same thing. That God will turn to the Gentiles — but to Israel the arms are outstretched to a stubborn people.

“Preaching Without Distinction” reflection and discussion questions:

1. What is preaching?
2. Why are our journeys, strivings, and failings futile?
3. Why does salvation draw near to you?
4. Why can we all rejoice to be ourselves?