

Greetings,

I hope this letter finds you all well. I have chosen to reflect on the lectionary reading this week in Romans. The reading is Romans 10:5-15.

5 For Moses writes that the law's way of making a person right with God requires obedience to all of its commands. 6 But faith's way of getting right with God says, "Don't say in your heart, 'Who will go up to heaven?' (to bring Christ down to earth). 7 And don't say, 'Who will go down to the place of the dead?' (to bring Christ back to life again)." 8 In fact, it says,

"The message is very close at hand;
it is on your lips and in your heart."

And that message is the very message about faith that we preach: 9 If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. 11 As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." 12 Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. 13 For "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."

14 But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? 15 And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!"

When I read this passage two memories came to mind. The first was a memory of an old primary school teacher of mine. To put the memory in a context for you I will first explain a bit about where and how I grew up. Many of you may know that I grew up in a small village in Essex it was the kind of place where everyone knew each other. My parents were known for being active members of a local church and as such our family was known to be a Christian family.

The memory I have of this teacher is how she used to tell me off when I got in trouble. Instead of telling me off like the other students, she would say, "you're not being very Christian." Or "that is not a Christian thing to do." When I reflect on the passage and this memory I realise that my teacher's understanding of faith seemed to be the approach that Paul is talking about which is trying to achieve faith by works or "righteousness by the law". (Verse 1).

In Mark 10:17-31 there is the story of the rich young man who came to Jesus asking how he could be saved. He declared that he had followed all the commandments but when challenged to give up his wealth and follow Jesus he went away unwilling to do this because of his wealth. It is not through our own actions that we are saved, it is through faith in Jesus. In verse 10 Paul states, "For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved."

The other memory that came to mind is of several conversations I have had over the years about faith. They have gone along the lines of either myself or the other person I was talking to sharing about how we had been struggling with our faith and looking for solutions to help improve it. These included reading the Bible more or spending more time in prayer. As I reflect on these, I realise that again what we are trying to do is improve our faith through works.

In fact, I have found when I am struggling like that sometimes the harder I tried, the further away from God I would feel. If I had a time machine and could go back to any of these conversations, I would suggest to myself or my friend that we read this passage. I would encourage both of us using verse 8, "The message is very close at hand; it is on your lips and in your heart." The message is of a God who loves us and will never abandon us (Hebrews 13:5) Therefore we do not need to nor can we strive through our own works to draw God closer to us. For it is by His grace that Jesus himself has come to us and lives in our hearts by faith.

As I conclude this letter, I want to leave you with some encouragement. The encouragement is the message of the gospel and the faith we profess written just for you.

Because of His love for you Jesus made himself a little lower than the angels. He descended from heaven to earth for you.

Because of His love for you, Jesus was crucified, taking the punishment for your sins on himself so that you could be forgiven.
Because of His love for you, Jesus defeated death and rose again so that through faith in Him you can share in that new life and live in relationship with him.

Let this faith live in your heart and on your lips.

May the blessing of Christ go with you this week.

God bless
Chris Coleman