



Romans 10:1-13
Believe
God Saves

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This morning we come upon what is perhaps the most important of the 10 Christian beliefs we're looking at in this series. It's hard, I suppose, to say that one is more important than another, and maybe that isn't fair for me to even say it. But we can summarize this essential Christian belief with this statement: **"I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ."** The focus on Jesus causes it to rise to the top for me and for a lot of Christians. And yet it is also the one that is most difficult to accept, on different levels, because it goes against everything we're taught about life.

Let me begin by sharing with you a story from my life that I hope will help us get into this. When I was in the 1st or 2nd grade, I started playing soccer. I played every fall up through my freshman year in High School. I played on the same team every year the first 5 years or so, then on another team for the last 2 or 3 years. Mr. Drummond was my coach on the first team, and Mr. Holmberg was my coach on the second team. In late elementary/early Middle School, I wanted to be a professional soccer player, and knew that playing for my high school team, and then for a college team, was a step toward that.

In High School, the soccer season was in the spring, and I started playing in the spring for my school my freshman year. I remember as the try-outs got closer and closer, I went out on my own to work on some of my skills. I went up to my neighborhood elementary school, Woodridge, where I had attended as a kid, and worked on my dribbling, my kicking longer kicks with accuracy, my throw-ins, and more. I just wanted to get back into things after having the previous few months off since the fall season had ended.

Soccer try-outs went well. I made the Junior Varsity team as a freshman. I even was a starter most games – maybe even all of them (I don't remember ALL the details), and played a lot of minutes in each game – at either right Midfield or right forward. It was a dream come true. And I realized that I had done enough. I'd worked hard, I'd become a skilled player in all those previous years, and trained well leading up to the tryouts, and I had done

enough.

Then the next year I made JV again. I didn't really expect to make Varsity my sophomore year, and I was very happy to play JV again. My junior year I had hopes and even expectations of making the varsity team. I was a good player, if a little undersized compared to others, but my speed and quickness oftentimes compensated for being vertically challenged. But, I made JV again. This time, I felt like I was not enough. And it didn't feel like it was my skills or abilities or attitude or my willingness to be a good teammate (not that I couldn't get better, of course). It was my size. Even my good friend who made the varsity team our junior year said – and still does to this day – that the head varsity coach in particular, preferred players that were taller.

For the first time in the world of soccer, a sport I had previously excelled at and each year I played was one of the 3 or 4 best players on my team, if not *the* best...for the first time I felt like I wasn't enough. And there was nothing I could do about it. No training, no skills development, no coaching on how to be a better teammate...nothing was going to be enough for me to make Varsity. So, my senior year I didn't play soccer. I played tennis (I made JV, which was fine – I had no expectations about tennis!), which at my school was also a spring sport along with soccer. Looking back, I have absolutely zero regrets about that choice. It prevented me from experiencing what I thought would be sure disappointment and learning a second time that I wasn't enough. Maybe if I'd turned out I would have made varsity as a senior. But I honestly don't regret it for even an instant that I didn't try out again. But I'll never forget feeling like who I was simply wasn't enough (though it's not something I dwell on or even think about much). Maybe you have sometimes felt like you aren't enough, or haven't done enough.

We live in a world that often causes us to ask questions like: “Have I done enough? Am I *doing* enough?” Have I done enough to get that job? Am I doing enough to keep the job I have? Am I doing enough, or did I do enough, in raising my kids? Am I doing enough to be “successful?” Am I doing enough so I can retire comfortably? Am I doing enough to love my spouse? Am I doing enough to _____? This is drilled into us from a young age and it sticks with us, and we can wear ourselves out trying to

answer with certainty that “yes, I’ve done enough.” It’s an American cultural thing, though we’re not the only culture that values this work ethic and question of have I done enough.

And for some people, this then becomes a driving question that they ask when it comes to their relationship with God. It’s a fair question to ask. After all, this is the God of the universe, who put all creation into place and has given us life, created in His image. The last two Sundays we’ve looked at the foundational Christian beliefs that God exists, and that the character of God is one of goodness. If you missed those messages, I would ask you to read or listen to them online, or pick up a paper copy in the lobby this morning. They lay the foundation for today’s message, where we are looking at what it takes to be in relationship with this God.

And so for many people, in their relationship with God, they are driven by this notion “have I done enough?” Actually, a lot of people *don’t* really ask that question until later in life, sometimes almost at their deathbed. **Why do they/we wait until then? Because suddenly the temporal nature of this life is staring them in the face, and the possibility of life with God, beyond the grave, is suddenly something that seems very desirable.** And so at that point, people sometimes finally ask, “Have I done enough?” Given today’s cultural climate of “everyone gets to eternal life” or “all the good people get to go to heaven” (even though “good” is defined differently by everyone – where is the line drawn?) it’s not surprising that at the end of life someone might wonder: Does everyone *really* get to experience eternal life, and if the possibility exists that *not* everyone does: “Have I been good enough? Have I done enough?” So why wait until right near the end to ask this question? Have you done enough to have a relationship with God – both now, and in eternity?

Last week I mentioned a passage in the gospel of Mark, that’s also recorded in Luke’s and Matthew’s accounts of the life of Jesus, where a man came up to Jesus, fell on his knees, and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus talks to him about this word, “good” for a moment, which is what we focused on last week. But after that, the conversation continues: **Jesus said, “You know the commandments: ‘You shall not**

murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.” “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth (Mark 10:19-22).

This guy came to Jesus wanting to know if what he’d done was enough to have eternal life. In other words: was he doing enough to be in relationship with God on the other side of the grave? But the point Jesus is making in his response isn’t actually that the guy had to do more to inherit eternal life and experience eternity with God. The response Jesus was looking to elicit from him was “I can’t...I can’t do any more.” In other words: he can’t do enough. **The only way this relationship comes about is by God’s initiative; by His grace.**

It has been this way since the beginning. When Adam and Eve ate from the fruit of the tree that God told them not to eat from, a change came about in them that has been carried on in all of us ever since. For them, right off the bat there was blame, lies and hiding from God. We still blame, lie, and hide from God. I did that for a long time, and it was all my family’s fault. ☺ Then, one of their sons, Cain, took it even further when he killed his brother, Abel. None of this is how God created us to be, and it causes a breach in our relationship with God.

For Adam and Eve, God gave an act of grace in clothing them. Because they ate the fruit, they realize they are naked, and they’re now ashamed of that fact, and so God covers them with an animal skin. It’s God’s first act of grace toward them in their fallen state, and he sheds blood to save them from their shame and guilt.

Fast-forward to the first century A.D., and God once again covers us – though not physically, but spiritually – and sheds blood to save us from our shame and guilt, as Jesus dies on the cross. This is most commonly what we think of when we Christians speak of God’s saving act: that Jesus

died on the cross to save us from the effects of our sins – which is separation from God, a broken relationship with God.

When I was in middle school and early high school, I had a couple different paper routes. This was back when kids delivered the papers, rather than the huge routes they have today that necessitate driving in a car because of the distance and the number of papers. I used to be able to carry my papers in a canvas bag – either over my shoulders, or my most usual way, was with the bag hanging on my handle bars – with 16 or so news papers on either side, hanging down. It was a little tricky to balance, but it worked really well. The money I earned from that paper route went straight to the bank. I *saved* my money. I didn't know exactly what I was saving it for, but I knew that I should save my money and eventually figure out a purpose for it. Well, the purpose of that paper route money ended up being to buy Gwen's engagement ring.

You see, “saving” isn't just about being kept safe from some negative outcome – like being saved from the consequences of our sin. **“Saving” is also about being saved *for* something; being saved for a purpose.** And God saves us for a purpose, and that purpose is to be in relationship with Him. It's a purpose that begins here in this life, and continues in the life to come.

This gracious and saving act through Jesus is available to anyone. Jesus died for the world, not a select few – he says so himself. And a person can come to hear about that and understand about Jesus' death in any of a myriad of ways. There is no one way to Jesus. Some grow up hearing about Jesus in their family, some never hear of Jesus until their later years; some hear about Jesus in church, some hear about him in a coffee shop, or in a rock concert, or on a weekend retreat, or through reading a book. There's no one way to find out about Jesus. But Jesus *is* the one way to a relationship with our Creator, the one way to a relationship with God here and now, and in eternity.

Our part is to respond in belief and trust. That's what the heart of today's passage is about. Romans 10:9 says, **“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the**

dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9).” So while there’s nothing we can do to make a relationship with God, we can respond to what God has already graciously done. And that is to believe in your heart that Jesus is raised from the dead (and although Paul doesn’t write it here but does elsewhere, but a closely connected part of that is believe that Jesus first died on the cross for your sins), and declare with your mouth that “Jesus is Lord” – you will be saved. Not only saved “from” the effects of sin in your life, but also saved “for” a new purpose: to be in relationship with God.

In this passage, Paul writes a lot about “righteousness.” It’s the Greek word, *diakosune*, and it means “the state of a person who is as he or she ought to be; a condition acceptable to God.” In verse 10 of today’s passage, Paul continues on to write, **“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved (Romans 10:10).”** And this word “justified” is *diakosune*. Earlier in the passage it was used several times and translated as righteousness. The point is, it’s through believing in Jesus, and confessing with our mouths that Jesus is Lord, that we are “*diakosuned*” – that we are justified, that we have righteousness, that we are as we ought to be, that we are in a condition acceptable to God. And that is when we are in a right relationship with God.

The only thing we “do” to get there is to believe it in our hearts and say we believe it with our lips. And this is not just Paul’s thinking. Jesus said the same thing, and numerous times equated himself to God the Father, equated his teaching to God’s Word, and pointed to himself as the one who saves us and brings us into righteousness, brings us into a right relationship with our Heavenly Father.

And what we see is that: **What Jesus has done is enough.** We can’t earn or work our way to righteousness...to a state we ought to be in...to a relationship with God. That’s what Jesus has done. We believe it and confess it. We don’t have to do anything else. That’s a hard thing for us to understand and grasp, because as I said at the start: our society is all about “doing, doing, doing.” Even for us pastors, it’s a hard thing to let people live into, because (for example) attending church is not a requirement to be saved. Paul doesn’t write: believe in your heart, confess with your mouth, and attend church

services every Sunday. I wish he did – and that he'd written to be in worship on time. But it's not there. ☺

Now, that doesn't mean we don't attend worship services, or don't do good works, and so forth. Our faith leads us into those things. Our grateful hearts lead us to praise God. Our desire to be more Christ-like in our lives, and grow in our discipleship leads us to study the Bible and serve our neighbors and people in the church, and so forth. So it's not that these things are bad or wrong. As one pastor put it when talking about his mom's last few days on earth before she died: "My mom's lack of involvement in the church robbed her. It robbed her of her assurance of salvation; and it robbed her of her growth in Christ, so that in her final hours, she was frightened." It wasn't that she wasn't a believer in Jesus, but she hadn't really lived it out in the community of a church: in service of others, in discipleship classes or small groups, in worship, and so forth. Not doing that was her loss.

But the saving – both the saving from our sins, and the saving for righteousness – is accomplished by God. We can't do enough. And unlike my experience in High School when my soccer skills and my vertically challenged body weren't enough and I had no hope of making the varsity soccer team: there is hope for the future for us. There's hope for today, tomorrow and eternity. There is hope for a right relationship with God. That hope is found in Jesus Christ, because Jesus saves. He has done enough. He *is* enough. We respond to God's saving grace by believing and confessing that Jesus is Lord.

As we close out this message, I would invite you to join with me in this statement of faith about Jesus, and confess your own faith. If you have never said anything quite like this before, and if you believe in your heart that Jesus was raised from the dead, then I would encourage you to confess your faith here and now along with everyone else. Join with me in this simple statement: **"I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ."** And if you would like to make that confession more personal, to confess your own belief and your own trusting of Jesus, then I invite you to pray with me...Amen.