

WHO HAS BELIEVED?

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE

Romans 10:1–21

A VERSE TO REMEMBER

[I]f 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.

(Rom. 10:9)

Daily Bible Readings			
M	May 20	Joel 2:28–32	Call On God and Be Saved
T	May 21	Rom. 9:14–16, 25–33	Striving on the Basis of Faith
W	May 22	Rom. 11:1–4, 17–27	All Israel Will Be Saved
Th	May 23	Deut. 30:11–20	God’s Word Is Very Near
F	May 24	Mark 5:35–43	Do Not Fear, Only Believe
Sa	May 25	Isa. 52	A Beautiful Announcement of Salvation

STEPPING INTO THE WORD

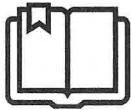
When I was in college, I attended a gathering of Christians through a parachurch organization. There was a lot to like about it. We read the Bible together and talked about what it meant for our lives. We prayed together regularly and encouraged one another as followers of Jesus. But there were also elements of the gathering that made me uncomfortable. I was expected to witness to nonbelievers and *win them* for Christ, because—I was told—they were lost, and God needed me to do something about it.

As a young woman exploring a call to ministry, I was challenged by the group’s very narrow reading of Scripture about women’s roles in worship, subordinate to men. Which was it, I wondered? Did God expect me to share my faith with others, or not? What do I do with a call to ministry if God (according to them) doesn’t want women to preach? I eventually left that group and wandered back across campus to the more mainline Protestant faith of my upbringing, where I remain today. I look back with thanksgiving for that group’s attention to personal faith, even while I disagree with their assumptions about how a life of faith looks.

I think about them when I read passages like the one from Paul today. Paul cares about faith and belief. He has a zeal for those who have not heard the good news about Jesus. He knows there is something compelling about words of faith in Christ that are shared. He believes with all his heart that Jesus is the way we are made right with God, and he wants everyone to know it.

Paul also is pretty clear that only God saves us. We can't save ourselves by saying the right words or doing the right things, and we can't save anyone else by saying or doing anything in particular. Our faith is a gift from God. We who are blessed by it are to live in grateful response.

O God, you give us faith as a gift, and we are grateful. Help us all believe and grow in faith. Amen.



SCRIPTURE

Romans 10:1–17

10:1 Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. ²For I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not based on knowledge. ³Not knowing the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. ⁴For Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

⁵Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them." ⁶But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "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). ⁸But what does it say?

"The word is near you,

in your mouth and in your heart"

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim), ⁹because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart, leading to righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, leading to salvation. ¹¹The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

¹⁴But 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

Note: Find Scripture Notes for this reading on the final page of the lesson.

never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵And 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!” ¹⁶But not all have obeyed the good news, for Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our message?” ¹⁷So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

JESUS IS THE CULMINATION OF THE LAW

Paul begins with a fervent prayer that Israel may be saved (see 9:31). By Israel, he means devout Jews who continue to follow the law of Moses, without the new understanding that comes in Jesus. He says “they have a zeal for God,” but it is based on an old paradigm of righteousness. Paul knows the devotion and the drawback of that kind of life. Before meeting Jesus, he had all the right attributes: “circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless” (Phil. 3:5–6). The old paradigm led Israel to believe they could establish their own righteousness and relationship with God through following the law. Paul himself tried and failed. This was not because the law was bad, but because human beings are sinful and misunderstand God. Our attempts to justify ourselves despite God’s intentions are a throughline in the long history of Scripture.

Now, in Christ, we meet One who breaks that pattern. He is the “culmination of the law” (Rom. 10:4), making righteousness freely available for all who believe. Belief—faith in Christ—is what leads to a right relationship with God and not any works of the law we manage to do ourselves. Paul’s understanding is that this was always God’s intention. Jesus Christ—the Messiah, the follower of Torah, the crucified and risen One of whom the prophets spoke—has fulfilled what Torah was never going to do without him.

The word translated as “culmination” in verse 4 is the Greek word *telos*. Like the English word *end*—also one of its possible translations—it can mean either the termination of something or the goal of something. N.T. Wright explains that it’s one thing for a road trip to end because the car broke down on the road. It’s another for it to end because you have finally reached your destination.¹ Torah didn’t break down, leaving God’s people stranded.

1. N. T. Wright, “Letter to the Romans,” in *Acts; Introduction to Epistolary Literature; 1 Corinthians*, vol. 10, *New Interpreter’s Bible*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 658.

Jesus has brought Torah's journey to its intended close, allowing us all access to God.

To make his point, Paul quotes (in Rom. 10:6–9) Deuteronomy 30:12–14, in which God promises that even if Israel is exiled (which, much later, they are), God will restore Israel and enable them to keep the law anew, with all their heart and soul. Paul declares Jesus (who both came down and rose up) as the fulfillment of that promise and the way God offers salvation to all.

? How do you understand Jesus as the culmination of the law?

CONFESSING OUR FAITH

Paul is certain that righteousness and salvation come through faith, not by anything we do. He writes, “For one believes with the heart, leading to righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, leading to salvation” (Rom. 10:10). A word of caution here: It is so easy to fall back into our usual trap of turning our relationship with God into something that we have to manage with enough effort. When we read “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (10:9), do we hear, *Say these particular words and believe these right things, and then God will save you?* Do we think that about others? Do we think it about ourselves? Do we assume that attending worship, serving in mission, giving our offerings, and studying Scripture will ensure that God loves us? Even when we learn that's not the way God works, we are creatures of habit and prone to sin, and we repeatedly forget everything Paul has been telling us (which just proves his point that we need Jesus).

It's useful to consider two different ways we understand *confession*. Your faith community may have a regular practice of confession of sin, either individually or corporately, as part of weekly worship. That sort of confession is a statement of guilt. It's acknowledgment that we have erred and separated ourselves from God and one another. As followers of Jesus, we confess our sins, and we simultaneously trust in the good news of God's forgiveness. It's a confession of where we have gone wrong, expressed within the sure knowledge that we belong to God anyway.

There's another way we talk about confession—as a confession of faith—a recitation of what we believe. As with a confession of sin, we state our faith in worship too, sometimes using historical creeds and statements called confessions of the church.

For Paul, and for us, guilt still has a place in this kind of confession. One of the major tenets we believe is that we all sin and fall short of God's intentions for us. But Paul reminds us in Romans that Jesus has already and finally transformed our confessions of sin. They do not represent the end of our journey with God. Rather, in him, we can now see the ultimate destination: reconciliation with God, and righteousness. Just as our confession of sin is followed by a declaration of God's grace, our confession of faith says both parts out loud too.

? How does your faith community make use of confessions of sin and confessions of faith? How do they illumine your understanding of Paul's message about faith?

STEPPING INTO THE WORLD

Our confessions of faith also help us give voice to the good news others need to hear. As Paul wrote to the Romans, he was gathering support to take the gospel west. It's hard for us to comprehend how news spread in those days, as oversaturated as we are with messages from every sort of source. Gentiles and Jews in the diaspora (outside of Palestine) had few ways of learning about Jesus besides a letter or the words of a storyteller. Paul wants those reading his passionate and forceful words to help him carry the message farther. His zeal has transformed from keeping the law to sharing faith.

The call to share faith looks different for each of us. We aren't all Paul. We don't have the same gifts of preaching, teaching, or evangelism. The ways in which we might be a messenger of faith are individual. We must also wrestle with the knowledge that the zeal of some missionary efforts have led to atrocities that haven't been told in our history books. The medieval Crusades were a bloody attempt to spread Christian faith and control holy sites through military dominance. The spread of the gospel across North America came at the horrific expense of enslaved people and native people and communities. People of faith have taken Paul's words and twisted them into anti-Semitic rhetoric that continues today. These realities must figure into our confessions of sin.

At the same time, the gospel has birthed movements of peace, hope, and love that have changed lives and perhaps even history for the better. The past year of lessons in the Uniform Series is one example: we've marked 150 years of cooperation across twenty-six denominations to study the same passages of Scripture

and grow in faith. As you join this collaborative effort, you are participating in a diverse and worldwide communion of faithful followers of Jesus that Paul could scarcely have imagined.

Our lessons this unit have invited us to examine our faith. We've considered how challenges in life become opportunities to nurture our faith. We've looked at Scripture throughout the New Testament asking us to dig deep into the faith we profess. We've traveled with Jesus as he encounters people in various stages of faith—often surprising and challenging those around him—and us. We've wrestled with the deeply theological words of Paul, who pushes our understanding of faith in familiar and in new ways, stretching us over and over. As we close this unit, consider your faith. Receive it as a gift from God. Know that in Christ Jesus, you belong to God, today and always. Thanks be to God!



How would you finish this statement today? My faith assures me that _____.

SCRIPTURE NOTES

The following notes provide additional information about today's Scripture.

1. Following the law brings righteousness, for the law is God's standard. But our actions are not up to God's standard and cannot address the sins committed against God (Rom. 10:5; see v. 3) and thus cannot lead to restoration to God.
2. Paul's quotation of Deuteronomy 30:12–14 (in 10:6–9) is meant to remind believers that Christ has already completed the ministry of our reconciliation with the Father (from incarnation to resurrection); all that is left to do is trust him for a process he's already completed.
3. Paul separates out the moment of belief and the confession that flows naturally from belief (Rom. 10:10), not because he sees them as separate actions, but in order to highlight the natural flow of one to the other; our actions reflect our truest beliefs (see also Jas. 2:14–17), making righteousness and restoration with God part of the same state of being.
4. Paul summarizes his arguments from Romans 1–5 (esp. 3:1–2) by eradicating the boundary between Jew and Gentile (10:12–13); placing all on equal footing of faith before God; making distinctions of dress, language, diet, or calendar completely irrelevant for salvation then as now.