

Excuses, Excuses, Excuses! Pt. 2  
Romans 10: 17-21

We began looking at the conclusion to this chapter last time we were together, and the question why had not the Jews believed on Jesus Christ? And it is amazing because people are always looking for an excuse of why they have not believe or trusted in Jesus Christ. Some look at the followers of Christ and say they live hypocritical lives, and that might be true or false, but it is a smoke screen, because it takes us away from man's sin and their need of a redeemer. People are always looking for excuses, and never truly look at their own lives and hearts, and how that need is met in Jesus Christ. "Well, the gospel is unfair to the heathen that have never heard the message." We are talking about your need. Let God worry about people in distant lands. Behind all these questions people are really questioning the goodness and righteousness of God. And after giving the promise in this chapter that any and all who call on the name of Christ, Paul who is trained in debate starts to think of the excuses that a Jew or someone might make as to why the Jews have not believed the gospel, and at the core of these excuses is that God has somehow been unfair.

And the first excuse is in verse 18, and that is whether they heard the gospel or not. They have not been given ample opportunity to hear the gospel. And here is the amazing thing: God has made this gospel not only heard and accessible to the Jews but to all kinds of people. At the time of the writing of this epistle, the gospel has already gone out to both Jew and Gentile alike. Just like God's revelation in creation is for everyone to know, the gospel is good news for everyone. And God has faithfully and lovingly sent out his messengers. The first century Jews had been given ample opportunity not only to hear Christ crucified the hope of glory but also to respond to that message.

The second excuse is given in verse 19, and that is: maybe they didn't understand the message. It is one thing to hear a message but it is another thing to understand a message. I can remember someone once telling me about the flow of electricity and how it works, and I heard the message but I didn't understand still how it worked. And maybe it is like that. But what Paul does is quote Moses and the Jews response to the Gentiles believing on Jesus as the Saviour and receiving eternal life. "Not a nation" means that they were not "the" nation or people chosen by God. And the meaning of "foolish nation" is their superstitious religions that had nothing to do with the real God. But here were these people, and all of a sudden they are believing on the Jewish hope of the coming of Messiah. They are learning the Jewish Scriptures and revelling in the promises of God. There was no jealousy or anger when they were stuck in their foolish religious systems but now they were believing in the Christ. And that hatred and anger revealed that they got the message. They understood what it meant, and how it upended their whole religious system of works righteousness.

Just like they hated Christ, they hated Paul because they understood the message. When Stephen preaches the gospel to the Jews they pick up stones in anger and killed him because they understood the message. And it is the same today. When you look at why people stand opposed to Christianity and even hate believers, so often it is because they understand the message. It is not that they do not understand the message. They just do not want to submit to that message. And believers, who love

Christ and see their need are many times taken aback at the rejection of the gospel. Maybe they have never heard. Okay they have heard. Maybe there is something faulty in the way it was presented. Maybe I have to find a new way. Here is a hard truth that we already stated in this passage, and that is the vast majority who hear the message will understand it, and it is because of that understanding that they will reject it. And I want us to see that this morning in the last reason why they reject the message of the gospel, and then I want us to see the character of God through this rejection.

1. People reject the gospel because of the nature of the gospel. V. 20.

Right in this verse is the answer why the Jews rejected and hated that message the most, and it has to do with the nature of the message and also the nature of God. This message is not based on worth or anything in me but based on grace and grace alone. And grace indicates that I am a nobody. That is what it means in the last verse to be “not a nation.” We are nobodies before this world and before God. We have no right to come into his presence, yet God calls us into his presence. It is an amazing Gospel message that has at its heart grace. And grace means that we get God’s favour which we do not deserve. But people hate that they are nobodies, that they are undeserving, that they need someone else to live that life that they could never lived. And no one hated it more than the unbelieving Jew. He heard the message and understood it, and therefore detested that message and all who preached and believed in that message.

So look at what Paul says here, **“Then Isaiah is so bold as to say, ‘I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.’”** He is quoting Isaiah 65:1, but in the quote it is not Isaiah speaking but the Lord. This is an interesting quote. And the reason why is Paul uses it a little different than he uses it in Isaiah. In chapter 63 of Isaiah just before this quote there is a complaint by Israel that God is distant and cannot be found. But God says that he is always near, and that there is a rebellious and pious group in Israel, and he is still willing to be found by those who are not even seeking him, and showing himself to those who do not even ask for him. Paul takes these words and applies it to the Gentiles who have come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ to show to any of the Jews that he is not hidden, or he did not hide the gospel but again that he is easily found, and is willing to forgive sin.

So he says, **“I have been found by those who did not seek me.”** We realize the truth of Romans 3:10-11, **“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.”** No one seeks for God. But here God has been found by those who did not seek him. And there is a sense where the Jews were always seeking him in one sense. They were fervent to obey and understand his Law, and live a righteous life for God. Look at verse 2 of this chapter, **“For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.”** Look at that word “zeal.” They would say that they are zealously pursuing God, and yet, this is the part the Jews hated and detested is that God was found by people who weren’t even looking for him or pursuing after him. They were living in their lives with really no thought of the one true God until the apostles and other missionaries came preaching the gospel, and they were wonderful found by God. And many of you have had that similar experience. Life

has not been a quest for the one true God, but somehow and some way God sent an individual or individuals in your life to proclaim Christ and he found you.

And look at the second half of the quote, **“I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me.”** It is the same meaning here. They were not pursuing or asking for the God of the word, the true God of heaven. That is the amazing thing about God and his grace. He has a way of not only finding us but showing himself to us so that we believe on him. This statement is a statement of God’s effective grace in the life of the believer. In our experience it seems that we have sought for God and then asked for God, but in actuality from God’s perspective it is his grace that has sought for us. That is the nature of salvation that it is all of God. It is his doing. This is the nature of salvation. God is not seeking a people that are seeking him or that deserve salvation because no one deserves his salvation. Salvation is totally by grace alone. And the Gentile nations don’t deserve this salvation. You can see it how they live lives without God and are not even trying to find him. It is not by works or effort on our part but totally by God’s grace.

And this is evidence that Israel once again understood the gospel, because they hated Paul’s message of justification by faith alone in Christ alone through the grace of God alone. Again, we ask: why would anyone hate grace? Grace preaches that God gives me through Jesus Christ what I do not deserve. So why would anyone hate that message? Well look back at Romans 10:3-4, **“For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”** What were the Jews trying to establish? Their own righteousness. Look how we have sought the one true God compared to all the other nations and peoples of the world. Look how zealous we are to keep the law. We don’t need a righteousness from God. We have our own. And then Paul comes and says, **“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** And even proves that by using their own Scripture. He says in 3:19-20, **“Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”**

They hated this message. I have been amazed when many times you preach the gospel, and you preach on grace, and grace - God’s favour to ill deserving and undeserving sinners like us is good news, and people many times have clinched teeth. Why? Because they understand. They get it. Grace says I need the righteousness of another, and self-righteous and proud individuals hate that message. There is nothing faulty with the message sinners, which we all are, do not to be told that we are faulty. We want that message the closer we come to death that the way we loved others and lived our lives was more than enough to merit heaven. And I do not know how many funerals have had that message preached to comfort the family, and also appease their own hearts. But just because people hate the good news does not make the good news bad news or unnecessary news. It is the message that all need to hear, and respond to. It is still the message that Jews and all people need to bow the knee. Their anger many times indicates that they have understood the implications for their lives.

But the encouragement here is the gospel has touched, and these individuals more often than not were not even looking for it, and yet God found them, as we saw through this chapter by the faith preaching and proclamation of the gospel. And those individuals will praise God for all eternity. We become channels of God's grace. We know what to expect from the vast majority of people, but his gospel does touch individuals that we never thought it would touch. God is an absolutely compassionate God, and that is where we come to point two.

2. We need to see the response of God. V. 21.

It is amazing that when we look at God's sovereignty and human responsibility we have somehow figure out in our minds and be able to rectify the conundrum in our minds. But God's Word does. He is good and loving. And that goodness and love is shown and offered at all. We just have a hard time with that because in our minds he has to be one thing and not the other. We struggle with this in the bad things that happen in our lives. How can God be sovereign and good if this terrible thing happened or this natural disaster took place? And what people have opted for is that he is all good, but not all sovereign. But why would you run to a good who cannot change our circumstances or we would not run to a God who can use even the harmful things of life for our good and His glory? The Scriptures teach both God is sovereign and He is all good and all loving. Just like it teaches God is sovereign and man is responsible.

And it is amazing as we look at this chapter, and this last verse that teaches on the goodness of God and the responsibility of man, right after such a strong chapter on the sovereignty of God in salvation. Look at what Paul says here, **"But of Israel he says, 'All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'"** This is a continuation of the quote in the last verse which was Isaiah 65. And in the first half of the verse he speaks of the compassion that God has had towards those who did not seek him or the Gentile people. Here he shows his compassion to Israel. Look at the anthropomorphic language that is being used. God uses terms to define his compassion and mercy and love toward rebellious Israel. He says, "All day long I have held out my hands." The meaning of held out my hands is God is willing and wanting to welcome back. And notice that this is not just a one time appeal but he stands with open arms, and this is continuous. All day long as a Father waiting for his wayward son to come home.

And look at who God's arms are opened to: **"to a disobedient and contrary people."** Israel complained in Isaiah's time, God has hidden himself from us and is hard to find. And God says no, I am right here ready to accept you back. It is the same as in Paul's time. Even the foolish Gentiles could find Him, then the Jews with all their advantages could easily find him, but that was not the problem. But they were disobedient, in other words they resisted the will and the command of the Lord to come to him on his terms. They resisted such commands as Jesus gave in Matt. 11:28, **"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."** And they would not come. And the meaning of "contrary" is that they had an oppositional

attitude against Jesus Christ. They resisted him. It does not matter how many questions that Paul answers they resist the Son.

And many look at the last two verses and see that the contrast between the Gentiles who did not seek God and find him, and then the Jews who had the Scripture, but through their continued rebellion did not find him. And that is certainly there. But I think the main contrast is the attitude and desire of God in this verse and the attitude and desire of unbelieving and willful unbelief of Israel. God stands continually with open arms but Israel stands continually opposites and obstinate.

And do we not see the same thing today? There are preachers who preach and plead and argue and implore individuals to come. And God through them is making an appeal to be reconciled to him. He is opening his arms. And the message goes out Sunday morning and through radio and internet and God is constantly calling sinners to come to Him. Believe on Jesus Christ and you will be saved. And even though God stands with outstretch hands to receive sinners through Jesus Christ they are so obstinate that if Jesus came back today they would crucify him all over again. And yet here is the compassionate God. Don't you see that this just increases the guilt in the face of such love and grace?

And let me end with a couple of applications. And the one is we should be amazed at the grace of God in this passage that is shown to all. We should be overwhelmed at the love and mercy of God, because God standing with open hands is not what what people like us deserve. And we should be even more amazed that although he stands this way before every sinner, in the cases of some he gives more grace and causes the wilful heart of unbelief to believe and trust and love and desire Christ. Because without that grace this is a perfect picture of all of us, and we realize if we have rejected this glorious and grand and ongoing grace of God, how can we ever expect to escape his righteous judgment? We are a people that should be overwhelmed with the grace and mercy of God to such unworthy people as us.

The second application is maybe this verse describes you. God stands week after week and day after day with outstretched hands, and is calling you through his messengers who preach the gospel. You have heard it through your pastor, maybe parents, and in the songs that we sing, but every week, and month and even year you have resisted that message. You have made excuses just like the Jews in Jesus' time why you do not believe, and even when your questions are answered you still continue in your disobedience and in your defiance against him. Can you see how ugly a sin that defiance is in the face of such love and mercy? And here is the amazing thing: God has his hands open wide today and ready to bring you to himself through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Are you willing to come today?

The hymn "Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling," brings out some of the meaning in this verse, "**Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling - Calling for you and for me; Patiently Jesus is waiting and watching - watching for you and for me! ( the Chorus) Come home! come home! Ye who are weary come home! Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling, calling, O sinner come home!**" It is now time to come home. It is now time to bow the knee. O sinner come home to Christ.