

Excuses, Excuses, Excuses!  
Romans 10:17-21

We have been going through this chapter where we see that Paul's burden is for his fellow Jews to come to a saving knowledge of Christ. And we have seen some amazing promises of free and glorious salvation from the judgment of God in this chapter. Such as in verse 9, **"because, 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."** Not you might be but that you will be. And in order for that to happen there has to be a hearing of the gospel, and for that to happen someone must speak or herald that gospel message, and for that to happen one must be sent. And Paul therefore talks about those who proclaim the message and go to others in verse 15, **"And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'"**

And we looked at verse 16 last time that the vast majority of those who hear the gospel will reject the gospel, and that includes both Jews and Gentiles. Here in this passage Paul is talking about his fellow Jews that he is so burdened about. Look at verse 16, **"But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?'"** Paul says that this is a fulfillment of Scripture and quotes Isaiah 53:1, which is the great suffering servant of the Lord passage. And the message is that even though this one will come and give his life for the sins and iniquities of his people most will reject him. Most will not believe the message of Isaiah 53 when it comes to fruition.

And this really brings out the question: why do people do not believe in Jesus Christ? I mean do not we get confused by that? We know the gospel and the gospel makes such great sense. It is easy to see our sin, and easy to see that we can never live that life that we were meant to, and so easy to see the need of the Saviour. So we agree with the summary statement of verse 17, **"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."** Faith comes from hearing, and what are we hearing? The word of Christ, or the gospel. God is speaking through the preacher or proclaimer the actual voice of Christ through this specific historical message. God doesn't ask us to jump through hoops or do certain sacramental deeds or certain penance but believe what Jesus accomplished is enough. It is a simple and profound and logical and easy to understand and discernible message.

But here is the question then: why do not more believe? And the answer that Paul has given in chapter 9 is in verses 15-16, **"For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy."** God is sovereign in salvation. He is the one who ultimately causes one to trust in Jesus Christ. He is the Decider of destinies. And yet at the same time as you see in the final verse in chapter 10 God holds out his hands all day long inviting sinners to come to him and trust in Him alone. And again, we come to divine sovereignty in God deciding eternal destinies and at the same time the heart of God wanting and inviting all to come to him. I am not this morning trying to solve those truths and reconcile them in our minds, but simply proclaiming what the passage says, and

leaving the things that are not revealed to God. And therefore, when it comes to why people do not believe the gospel, and why the Jews did not believe the gospel and why others in our lives, community, country and world do not believe it is not God's fault. People and sinners are responsible for their decisions. It is not the fault of the message or the call of the message, the problem is with the sinner.

And what I want to look at this morning is three excuses that people make or even the Jews might make about why they do not believe the gospel. People are responsible and God is absolutely just. So what are the three reasons that others would look at the privileges and promises which were given to the Jews and that somehow God's word failed or God was unjust? And I want us to see God's stunning grace in the midst of those excuses. We will look at two of them today, and the other one next week along with the conclusion of the chapter.

#### 1. God is unjust because they have not heard. V. 18.

I am amazed at how many people use this very excuse every single day. They have awoken today from their beds and maybe have gone out for coffee or planned to watch the latest sporting event or maybe even have driven by a gospel preaching church, and have made a choice, or never even considered going out and seeking the One true God and Jesus Christ. The gospel is opened to them, and it is free for them to hear, and many have heard they just do not want to hear it again. And even if they never have heard they still can hear it. They can never say on the day of accountability that I never heard. God has made it readily available.

So look at what Paul says about his unbelieving brethren, **"But I ask, have they not heard?"** The first excuse that could be levelled is that the Jews have never heard the message of the Gospel; that Jesus is their long awaited Messiah. But have they heard? And the answer is a resounding yes. Remember, what Paul said about the need of hearing and having a preacher sent. And certainly there have been preachers sent such as Paul and Peter and the other disciples. They have had ample opportunity to hear that message of Jesus Christ. This message was not a cloak and dagger message but one that was published openly and to all.

And then to validate this claim he quotes Scripture, and look at what the text says, **"But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for 'Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'"** They have heard the Gospel. They cannot use this excuse. Now when we read the Scripture report about the voice of God going out to the ends of earth or world, it seems like a great quote. The problem with that quote is where it comes from. it comes from Psalm 19:4. If you recall that Psalm which is very familiar that it has two halves. The first half speaking of God's general revelation in creation, and the second half speaking about God's special revelation in his specific word or the Scriptures that have been given. The problem is this verse is in the first half. Let me just read the opening four verses of that Psalm, **"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."** This is

Paul's argument of the guilt of all people before God is that the voice or the witness of creation is gone out into all the world.

The problem here is that no one ever gets saved through general revelation. There is enough truth to condemn someone but not enough to save them. What Paul is talking about here that the Jews have heard the gospel. They have been sent preachers, so here is the question: why does Paul quote this verse and not some other verse that talks about the special revelation among the Jewish nation or the testimony of preachers that God has given to Israel? One way to look at this quote is that it is talking about general revelation, and that this divine revelation has gone out to all the world, and there is none that are without excuse. But it should be obvious from the whole context of this chapter that he is discussing the problem of Jewish unbelief of the gospel and why they specifically have not belief. Another way to explain this verse is to say Paul is just picking up the language of Scripture, He doesn't say that Moses said or God said. He is not appealing for Old Testament confirmation or support but just using the language that the Jews have heard the message of Christ all over the Roman Empire. God has been faithful.

But there is a third option, and that is Paul is using this quote about general revelation because of the universality of the message. The message of creation goes out to all people everywhere irregardless of who they are and where they live. It is the message that there is a Creator and you need to seek him. Where there is a sense when the Jews looked at the Old Testament revelation that this was for them. It was not intended for all people. God gave it to a people in a certain locale. They were never given a missionary mandate to go into all the world and make disciples. But the gospel is different. It's message like creation is universal in its extent. It is supposed to go out to all people. Jesus said in Matt. 28:19, "**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.**" He sends them of proclaimers of this message to all people and nations and tongues and tribes. Listen to Acts 1:8, "**But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**"

And look at the language of this verse, "**Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.**" Paul says the gospel has "gone to all the earth," and "to the ends of the earth." But certainly in Paul's day this would not be true. There were many places even beyond the Romans Empire that did not have a gospel witness yet. So what does he mean here? We even read of similar language in Col. 1:23, "**if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.**" Notice the language, "has been proclaimed in all creation," in other words done deal. And what he means here is not that all have heard the gospel but all types of people have heard the gospel. It has gone out to both Jew and Gentile. Again, there is a universal application to this message and even who the audience of this message is to be.

There are some people on our planet that do not know the name Jesus Christ, but that certainly is the minority. It is amazing the scope and breadth of the internet, radio broadcasts and video and the like, and how many countries, even closed countries that the gospel goes into. The gospel is heard and accessible. There is hardly

a person in our city that does not know something of Jesus Christ. There is very few that have no accessibility to that message this morning in our city. So none of them can claim ignorance. Just like the Jews in Jesus time could not claim ignorance. God has sent his labourers out and they have proclaimed and keep proclaiming that message so that they are without excuse. Every single one of us that are here this morning, have heard the message. If we have not repented and trusted Christ we cannot claim we did not know. Often we look at the scores of people without any access to the gospel, but what should amaze us is that every day there is such access to that message, but like general revelation that message is rejected.

2. Second accusation is that God is unjust because the message is too difficult to understand. V.19.

This is one of the things that we have seen in the last several chapters is that the totality of the gospel and God's means of salvation through Jesus Christ is in many ways difficult to understand. When we look at divine election, we realize this is a difficult doctrine, and along with human responsibility it makes our minds hurt. But how those two doctrines are reconciled is not the gospel in and of itself. There is a way that this gospel is very easy to understand, and readily discernible and understandable. The problem has never been understanding the message that God sent Jesus to live a sinless life and then take the punishment that I deserve so that he could forgive my sins, no the problem is human pride and arrogance that does not want this message.

And you can see this in this passage. **"But I ask, did Israel not understand?"** So Paul has just confirmed that Israel heard the gospel. It was preached in their presence, but now the excuse comes of why they are not responsible because maybe they did not understand that message. And Paul quotes an Old Testament passage to underline that Israel has understood that message. That was not the problem. The first is from Deut. 32:21, reads here in verse 19, **"I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation."** I will get back to the jealousy in a moment, but what does he mean "not a nation," because certainly the Gentiles were gathered in nations? And what he means is that they were not "the" nation that were given all the advantages that were outlines at the beginning of chapter 9, like the covenants and laws and promises.

He continues with that quotation, and here we have it in verse 19, **"with a foolish nation I will make you angry."** We will deal with anger in a second. What does he mean "with a foolish nation"? And what he means by that is their superstitions and beliefs and gods and goddesses in this world. It was so far from the truth. And we see even bizarre teachings and think even today about Karma or heaven or god, and it is amazing how easy it is to believe a lie and deny the truth. And these philosophies were alive and well in the ancient world just like today. As Paul came into Athens he faced many of these bizarre teachings. To the Jews they were the foolish nations and peoples.

But here is how we know Jews understood the gospel. We know because of their response when Gentiles or non-Jews started to not only have the gospel preach to them but also believe in that gospel message. These individuals that were not part of the "chosen nation;" these people who were "foolish" and idiotic, were now believing in their hope, which was the coming of the Jewish Messiah. They were now studying their

Scripture, and they were now welcomed into the kingdom that they maintained was exclusively theirs. Notice the word “jealous” again. When they saw the joy and peace and satisfaction that came to a people who were not a people, they became jealous. This is suppose to be our joy and peace. They could care less that Pilate carried on with his own religious system but it was when pagans started believing in Jesus that they began, as the text says hated believers and even persecute them. What does that response indicate? It indicates that they got the message. They understood the message, but that message confronted their own works-righteousness system and therefore had to be rejected and had to be destroyed. They became envious and even hated those who were of the way both Jewish and Gentile believers.

And you can even see this response among many that happen to be in the world today. Someone will come to Christ, and there might have even lived a very difficult life, dangerous life, and unprofitable life. They come to Christ, their lives start to clean up and they become profitable members of society, and yet people are angry and upset at them. They could continue on believing whatever they wanted but just not that Christian message. And the reason why is the same reason: it confronts their life and belief system. When they see the peace and joy of the believer, they are envious, but they do not want to come to Christ. They in their pride, rather than being thankful and happy for that individual will condemn them. This is what the gospel has done. It not only reconciles us to Christ but divides us from others. They become hostile to the believer and to the message. Atheism is another. If you want to believe in God that is fine as long as you are not hurting me, but they are angry and hostile in particular to the gospel message, and the problem is not that they do not understand that message, but they do. Their anger gives witness they understand and challenges their whole belief system.

And so often people will try to come up with these excuses of why they do not believe or others. And at the heart of those excuses is an attack against God. God has not given them a fair opportunity. But the gospel is everywhere, easily accessible and understandable so that all are without excuse. The problem is not God but a wilfully stubborn human heart. And let me end with two thoughts. One is as believers: we should be amazed at God’s goodness and grace not just to us but to all in making this gospel readily available to everyone around us. Yes we still have to be faithful, but God is so good in sending messengers and having that message so readily accessible to all. The second challenge is for you if you do not believe. What excuse will you make when you appear before God if he has offered you abundant grace in this life and you refused it? You cannot say that I never heard. You cannot say that I never understood. Today is the day to call on him. Please heed that call today.