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Sermon Notes

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The Word is Near You

Romans 10:5-10

Introduction: The Quest for the Holy Grail

What great thing would you do to save your soul?

Story found in November, 2001, New York Times, by Erick Eckholm:

“The snows had scarcely melted last June when 24-year-old Joama and her three male cousins, yak herders in the remote mountains of northern Tibet, embarked on the most sublime journey of their lives. Their departure was not marked by any ceremony. “We just started out,” she recalled. The four began mumbling mantras and raised their hands to heaven. They dropped to their knees and flung their bodies forward, fully prone against the damp earth. Then they stood up, took three small steps, and repeated the sequence.

For more than five months now they have prostrated themselves this way, all day every day, inch-worming their way to Lhasa and its holy sites. They slowly made their way through more than 100 miles of some of the world's harshest terrain, starting from above 14,000 feet, then followed a highway 200 more miles into Lhasa. They reached the city in early November. These days, they are inching their way along busy sidewalks as they follow the three hallowed circuits around the Jokhang Temple, the holiest site in Tibetan Buddhism, in advance of praying at its inner shrines.

Only here, it seems safe to say, could such a roadside spectacle attract little notice. Thousands of Tibetans undertake similar pilgrimages each year, not to mention the far greater numbers who reach holy sites by bus, tractor or ordinary treks of weeks or months.”

What great thing would you do to save your soul?

Religions around the world have a wide array of answers, and the more costly, astonishing, bizarre, unique and difficult, the better. In this way man has always sought to save himself.

- In Islam, Muslims are commanded to make a pilgrimage to Mecca, and many do at great cost
- In Hinduism, people make extraordinary efforts to travel to the River Ganges and wash in its supposedly holy waters. Timothy Kasbe told us recently also

of a Hindu woman who had just drowned her infant in the Ganges in an effort to atone for her sin.

- Medieval Europeans under the superstitious system of medieval Catholicism made long pilgrimages to Rome and crawled up the staircase of Pilate on their knees, uttering prayer after prayer to save their souls.
- Also during this era, the Dark Ages of Europe, a legend arose concerning the Holy Grail, the very cup that Christ had drunk from at the Last Supper. It was said to have immense healing powers, even to the point of granting immortality to the one who drank from it. So the Knights of the Round Table, King Arthur's knights, went on a quest for the Holy Grail... an arduous journey to save their souls.

There is inbred into the sinner's heart a question: What must I DO to be saved?

If the answer were some arduous, seemingly impossible task, we would be instantly motivated to do it...

The theme is touched on in 2 Kings, when a pagan military commander named Naaman desired to be healed from leprosy. He was urged by his Jewish slave girl to go see the prophet Elisha... Elisha told him simply to wash seven times in the Jordan River... this made Naaman irate! He said there are far better rivers in my home country... but Naaman's servants said a profound thing:

if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?

Suppose salvation were a scavenger hunt of arduous achievements: Suppose immortality awaited anyone who did the following challenging tasks: first, climb some sacred mountain in Tibet to pick a rare white and pink flower that only blooms once every seven years; then you had to gather a vial of water from the Nile River and bring it to a dying man in the outback of Australia; then help ten orphans escape the streets of Calcutta and enroll them in a private school in England; then amass \$10,000 by working with your own hands, and give the money to the poor in the Sudan; then, finally, you had to carve a twenty-pound block of ice from a glacier from the North Pole and carry it unmelted to the South Pole, people would do it.... GLADLY!!

Then having done all that, people would spend eternity boasting of their achievement. God will not have sinners boast of their achievement... so He made one way and one way only of salvation... and it involves not achievement whatsoever by human effort

This text speaks of two kinds of righteousness... that achieved by works of the law, and that which is given simply by believing the word of the Gospel.

Romans 10:5-10 Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." ⁶ But the righteousness that is by 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

deep?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).⁸ But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:⁹ That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

I. Righteousness By Law: What Seems Possible is Impossible (vs. 5)

vs. 5 Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them."

A. Eternal Life by Obedience to the Law

1. Two kinds of righteousness
2. First: the legal righteousness based on lawkeeping
 - a. "will live by them" means both live now on earth as a pattern of life AND live eternally before God
 - b. The person's standing based on the performance of the law
 - c. Comprehensive pattern of life
3. What Moses meant

Leviticus 18:5 Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.

- a. Promised Land given conditionally
- b. If the Jews kept the commands and decrees of the Lord, they would be permitted to keep living there
- c. Life in the Promised Land became a symbol for right relationship with God and future life in the New Heaven and New Earth
- d. Subsequent history showed the impossibility of keeping the law
- e. Peter's point at the Council of Jerusalem

Acts 15:10 Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear?

B. First Problem: Obedience Must be Perfect

1. God intends ALL of the Law, not just some of it

James 2:10-11 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

2. God intends ALL of the time, not just sometimes

Galatians 3:10 All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law."

3. God intends HEART obedience, not just external compliance

a. God commanded the Jews to internalize the Law

Deuteronomy 6:5-6 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.

b. God commanded things within the heart

Deuteronomy 5:21 "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbor's house or land, his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

The Law against coveting was invasive... it hit at the level of the thought life, the level of the desire; it was completely unenforceable by man, for no man knows the thoughts of another's heart

c. Christ made this abundantly clear in the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 5:21-22 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²² But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.

Matthew 5:27-28 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

C. Second Problem: Extra Credit Impossible

1. It is impossible to be more righteous than the commands of God

2. Medieval Roman Catholicism: Treasury of Merits... human saints had lived lives at a higher level than God required

3. Therefore, I can never be on any single day MORE RIGHTEOUS than God commanded!

D. Third Problem: No Atonement for Past Sins

1. Today's perfect obedience cannot pay for or atone for yesterday's sins
2. Nothing we can do today can take away from the past

Illus. Imagine a criminal promising the judge that from now on he will never murder again... first of all, the judge expects that, and there's no merit in it; secondly, that will not pay for his past crime

E. Jewish Legalists: Overconfidence Based on Human Traditions

1. **THEY THOUGHT IT WAS POSSIBLE!!!** They actually believed they were doing it... earning heaven by works of the Law
2. The Scribes and Pharisees made the law attainable by redefining it with human traditions
3. They actually believed they had perfectly obeyed all of Moses' commands, even though Peter said it was a yoke that no one has ever been able to bear!
4. But the Jews of Christ's day had it down to a system, so that the rich young ruler actually thought he was perfect before the Law
5. What a shock on Judgment Day... to find that what they thought was possible was impossible

ESV Romans 3:20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

II. Righteousness By Faith: What Seems Impossible Has Been Accomplished Already (vs. 6-7)

Romans 10:6-7 But the righteousness that is by 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 deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

A. Two Kinds of Life Contrasted: By Works and By Faith

Leviticus 18:5 Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.

Habakkuk 2:4 "the righteous will live by his faith"

1. The two are at odds with each other... they cannot be mingled... they are actually opposite

Galatians 3:12 The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them."

2. From the very beginning of Romans Paul has been commending the righteousness that comes by faith

Romans 1:16-17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

B. What Is Impossible for Man

1. The works righteousness in this text implies some great human achievement
2. Some great quest for godliness that implies immense effort day after day
3. So Paul reaches for Deuteronomy 30 and rearranges it a bit

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. ¹² It is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, "Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹³ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, "Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?" ¹⁴ No, the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.

- a. There, Moses was saying these commands in the Law are not so difficult that you have to go across the ocean to get them, but that God has brought them right down to your very ears
 - b. But in actuality, if it came to achieving a perfect righteousness, the Law was impossible for man... as impossible as flying to heaven or swimming across the sea
4. What is Impossible for Mortal Man
 - a. Ascending to heaven
 - b. Descending to the abyss
 - c. Language of the impossible... Moses and Paul are both saying that God in His grace has come right to where you live, and done what you could never have done
 - d. Ascending to heaven: represents the height of God's heavenly rule, far above all earthly powers

- e. The abyss: the deepest part of the ocean, representing the depth of the grave, of Hades itself
- f. SALVATION DOES NOT CONSIST IN ASTOUNDING HUMAN EFFORT, AMAZING HUMAN ACHIEVEMENT

Not those who achieve, but those who believe

Believe what? That Christ has already achieved everything for us!!

C. Christ's Perfect Achievement

1. Paul adds the Christ-centered phrases: "To bring Christ down" "to bring Christ up from the dead"
2. Focus is totally on Christ's achievement: what is impossible for man, Christ has already done!!!
3. You don't have to ascend to the heavens: to bring Christ down... He already has come of His own choice
4. You don't have to descend to the depths to raise Christ from the dead... He has already shattered the cords of the grave
5. What was impossible for man is perfectly achieved already by Christ
 - a. No human effort could have brought Christ down from heaven if He had not been of a mind to come
 - b. Christ sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, utterly unimpressed by our efforts and achievements
 - c. The Tower of Babel failed to reach heaven... but rather God had to descend to see their puny efforts
 - d. So also our best efforts to build a stairway to heaven falls pathetically short of heaven
 - e. Neither are we able to descend to the depths of the earth to mine righteousness like some precious stone or metal from the core of the earth

D. Two Central Doctrines: Incarnation and Resurrection

1. You couldn't have ascended to heave to bring Christ to the earth... Christ already came when He became human, when He came to earth as a baby in Mary's womb
2. You couldn't have brought Christ up from the dead... the resurrection was accomplished only by the sovereign power of God

3. These are the very same two doctrines Paul will present as essential to our salvation

Romans 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

“Jesus is Lord” = Incarnation; Jesus of Nazareth is actually God in the flesh

“God raised Him from the dead” = Resurrection

These are the very two things impossible in verse 7, accomplished totally by Christ

Thus, the gospel present salvation as essentially so simple a child could understand it!!

III. The Simplicity of Salvation

vs. 8-9 But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

A. Salvation Was Immensely Difficult for Christ

1. It cost Him everything He had
2. He stood day after day under the full weight of Satan’s most vicious attacks, and never once sinned
3. He bore the immense weight of God’s daily program of righteousness... preaching, healing, defending the truth against the false teachers
4. Most of all, he bore the immense weight of our sins and of God’s righteous and just wrath against our sins on the cross
5. So, for Christ salvation was an immensely difficult achievement

B. Salvation is Immensely Simple for Us

1. No scavenger hunt of righteousness
 - a. No long pilgrimages to holy shrines
 - b. No long hours of religious duties, no huge sums of money paid to charities, no twelve hour prayer vigils, no self-flagellation
 - c. Not a single righteous deed, work, or achievement... nothing can be handed to God to pay for our sins

d. Yes, all sorts of good works flow AFTERWARD by faith... but not one of them pays for our sins or makes us righteous

2. Paul is stressing the incredible simplicity of salvation... just as Jesus did

Matthew 18:1-4 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them³ and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

3. Astounding, the range of the Gospel!!

a. The immense, unsearchable counsels of God in eternity past, election, predestination, sovereign power hardening and showing mercy as He wills, according to His inscrutable plan

Romans 11:33-34 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

b. YET so simple a child can understand and be saved now, today, here

i) Little children can get the basic concept: Jesus is God, He came to earth as a baby, lived a life on earth as a man, died on the cross for sins, God raised Him from the dead; He can forgive all your sins

ii) Blue collar workers, peasants in Russia, street urchins in Calcutta, simple-minded, humble people all over this globe can understand the word of faith Paul was proclaiming

c. So simple we actually **must become like children** to accept it, to humble ourselves to its message: stop working, stop achieving, stop philosophizing, stop all your prideful efforts... lower yourself, humble yourself, and allow Christ to be your Savior

C. The Word is Near You

1. God is bringing the salvation message RIGHT TO WHERE YOU ARE

2. Christ, the Word of God, is coming to your doorstep, right to where you live

3. The incarnation: "Immanuel is God with us"

John 1:1, 14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

4. So also the proclamation of Christ is coming right to where you are

vs. 8 *But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming*

- a. The word of Moses... the Law of the Old Covenant was close to the Jews, so they didn't have to travel across the sea or up to the heavens to get it
- b. BUT it was still distant from their hearts: it was external, engraved in tablets of stone, on the outside of them, standing over them, telling them how to live, but unable to give them life
- c. THIS word, the word of the Gospel, has a living power from Almighty God... the power to produce life where there was death, the power to transform you from rebellious God-haters to loving adopted sons and daughters
- d. This word is near you now... this word of faith Paul is proclaiming: it will come inside your heart and fill it; then it will fill your mouth and fill your life with its holy power

D. The Heart First, then the Mouth

1. The word of faith, the simple gospel message enters your heart by faith
2. From the inside, your whole life is changed, you speak your faith, then live it day after day

E. The Content and Character of Saving Faith: Next Time

Romans 10:9-10 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

IV. Why God Made Salvation Simple

A. First, To Destroy All Human Pride

1. Pride in knowing deep thoughts
2. Pride in achieving great deeds
3. Both destroyed in the message of the cross!!

1 Corinthians 1:18-19 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is

written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

1 Corinthians 1:29, 31 so that no one may boast before him. ... Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

B. Second, To Save All Kinds of Sinners

1. Most people in the world are simple, basic thinkers
2. God knows they will not spend hours pondering the depths of theology and the refinements of theological reasoning
3. They will live simply, eat simply, work simply, laugh simply, think simply, and die simply... they will be buried in unremarkable graves, and they will be forgotten within three generations
4. But God wants them saved, and so His basic message is so simple a child can accept it

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

V. Application

- A. The Quest Ends Here: Not by Your Achievement But By Christ
- B. Humble Yourself, Become Like a Child, and Accept this Simple Word
- C. Do Not Despise the Simplicity of Basic Christianity
- D. Do Not Despise the Complexity of the Full Revelation of God
- E. "Cease Striving" and Be Saved