Lent 1 Romans 10:8-13
March 6, 2022 455-472-419-422

Use Your Bibles!
I. Through His Word God reveals salvation in Jesus.
II. Through His Word God works faith in our hearts.

Dear Christian friends,

You know that **in some churches** it's traditional to **give up** something for Lent – **maybe** a favorite food, candy, etc. **Several years** ago I read about a pastor who **suggested** something else. Instead of GIVING UP something for Lent he encouraged his people to TAKE UP something for Lent – to **take up** their Bibles and read the NT during Lent.

That's certainly more God-pleasing that JUNKING JUNK FOOD for Lent. There's no command for that **in the Bible** but there are plenty of passages ORDERING us to **be in** God's Word. Today's gospel reading strongly emphasized **both** KNOWING and USING God's Word. So do **these verses**. Paul tells you and me, "USE YOUR BIBLES!" **Use** your Bibles because through His Word 1)God reveals salvation **in Jesus** and 2)God works faith **in our hearts**.

I. Through His Word God reveals salvation in Jesus.

These verses pick up IN THE MIDDLE of Paul's **train of thought**. Paul is dealing with that ALL-IMPORTANT QUESTION of ***"What must I do to be saved?"*** That question can be put in **different ways**. "How can I HAVE PEACE with God? **How** can I be sure God LOVES and forgives and **accepts** me? **How** can I be sure I am going to heaven when I die?" NO MATTER HOW that question is asked we MUST HAVE the **right answer**. It's a matter of life or death – ETERNAL life or death.

Paul has pointed out that **many** people THINK they have the right answer to that question but **in fact** they are TOTALLY WRONG. **Many people** are very religious. They take their faith and their personal relationship with God SERIOUSLY. Yet they are dead wrong **when it comes** to this **all-important** question. WRONG because they think that **somehow** they must earn their salvation – IF they want peace with God then they must MAKE PEACE with God. Paul had used his own people the Jews as an example. ***"They have a zeal for God, but it is not consistent with knowledge. Since they were ignorant of the righteousness FROM GOD and sought to establish THEIR OWN righteousness."***

That is not salvation IN CHRIST but a **salvation** BY THE LAW – a being forgiven – a getting **to heaven** – by HOW WE LIVE – by OUR OBEYING God. Ideally **if** a person keeps all the commandments **perfectly** for his WHOLE LIFE he will go to heaven. The only problem with that is we CAN'T DO it! We are born sinful and every day we sin in **countless ways**. The commandments are not "DO YOUR BEST" but "DO IT – OR ELSE!" – **or else** suffer the consequences. Unlike a school test where you can have some wrong answers and STILL PASS the **commandments** are strictly PASS OR FAIL – a perfect score or you FLUNK.

James wrote, ***"Whoever keeps the whole law yet stumbles in just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."*** Just one sin makes me a GUILTY sinner deserving death and hell's eternal punishment. **Sin** is not simply a MISTAKE or **poor choice** but rebellion – REJECTING **God's authority over** our lives. Making God a CONVENIENCE in our lives **instead** of the center of our lives – not being diligent in our **prayers** or **worship** – carrying grudges – cheating at school or on my taxes – **gossiping** – sex outside of marriage is NOT OK but DAMNABLE. Ignoring **anything** GOD SAYS or wants is not just stupid – it's IDOLATRY – putting ourselves over God and **not under** Him.

That's why it's so important to USE OUR BIBLES. THROUGH His Word God reveals salvation **in Jesus**. John wrote, ***"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of***

God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." Paul here quotes the OT prophets Isaiah and Joel. ***"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."***

Through His Word God reveals Jesus AS OUR SAVIOR. That's what the Bible is **all about**. That's what Lent is **all about** – not OUR GIVING UP something for God but God giving up His own Son **to pay** for all our sins. ONLY IN the Bible does God reveal that He ***"sent His Son born of a woman"*** to take our place under God's law and perfectly obey every commandment for us. **Only in the Bible** does God reveal that He punished His own ***"beloved"*** – His SINLESS Son – **for the sins** of the whole world. ONLY IN the Bible does God reveal that Jesus was ***"pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities."*** ONLY IN the Bible does God reveal that ***"the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from ALL sin."***

ONLY IN the Bible does God reveal salvation **in Jesus**. **Here** God says, "STOP LOOKING **at yourselves**! LOOK TO Jesus and be saved!" **With the Bible** God PUTS OUR FOCUS on Jesus' cross and His **empty grave**. That's why Paul tells you and me, "USE your Bibles!" We need to drop the **excuses** and get into the HABIT of reading our Bibles **every day** JUST AS GOD WANTS us to. That revelation of Jesus **as our Savior** is what makes worship THE HIGH POINT of the week – **what makes** coming to Communion SO COMFORTING - **what makes** Bible class an OPPORTUNITY we **won't want** to miss – **what makes** those Lenten services SO SPECIAL. We're not doing God A FAVOR when we come to church. Worship is ABOVE ALL ELSE God serving us **through His Word** and Sacraments. GOD USES His Word to feed our souls His **life-saving** – LIFE-CHANGING - **gospel**.

II. Through His Word God creates faith in our hearts.

Paul wasn't telling these Roman Christians ANYTHING NEW. ***"'The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart,' that is, the word of faith that we are proclaiming."*** It's NOTHING NEW but Paul doesn't hesitate to urge us to USE our Bibles. We need to ***"search the Scriptures"*** to ***"grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*** We need that constant encouragement to ACTUALLY USE our Bibles **because** it's so easy to NOD our heads **"yes"** and then keep ignoring our Bibles.

The devil knows HOW POWERFUL God's Word is. **He knows** that if he can get us to SKIP church and AVOID Bible class – if he can convince us we're TOO TIRED for those **Lenten services** and too busy for those **daily devotions** – then he's won a MAJOR VICTORY over us. The **devil knows** that the more HE KEEPS US OUT of God's Word the weaker our faith will be and the easier it will be for **him to tempt** us.

THROUGH His Word God creates and strengthens faith in our hearts. Yes, the Bible is filled with historical facts – **names, places** and **speeches** – from thousands of years ago. Since not all of us are HISTORY BUFFS the devil will tell us that the Bible is BORING – hard to **understand** – NOT RELATING to our lives today. Yet we must know these facts – they are OUR SALVATION. Right after this Paul asked, ***"How can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard?"***

At the same time SIMPLY KNOWING Bible **facts** isn't SAVING FAITH. The devil knows the Bible. He can quote the Bible. We saw that in the gospel reading. But that doesn't make the devil a **Christian**!

Saving faith is both KNOWING and BELIEVING – TRUSTING – what the Bible teaches about Jesus. Paul writes, ***"Certainly, 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. For it is with the heart a person believes and is justified, and it is with the mouth that a person confesses and is saved."***

HEART and MOUTH – ***"faith and confession"*** – THAT is a true – living – saving faith. **Faith** is the confidence of the **heart** – the **heart** RELYING on Jesus and all He's done for us. That heartfelt faith is ALIVE and ACTIVE. Yes, it is a faith IN OUR HEARTS – a **faith** that shows up in our **everyday lives**.

James put it this way, ***"Faith, if it is alone and has no works, is dead. Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works."*** Faith **in the heart** MAKES ME a Christian. The outward confession of **that faith** with our LIPS and DAILY LIVES identifies us **to others** as Christians.

Through His Word God creates and strengthens that LIVING faith in our hearts. It's also a VERY SPECIFIC faith. Simply saying, "I BELIEVE in God" is not saving faith. WHAT GOD is the person talking about? What does **that person** believe ABOUT God? The true – saving – Christian faith is that ***"Jesus is Lord"*** and that ***"God raised Him from the dead."*** Saving faith is TRUSTING in the triune God and that Jesus is the **eternal Son** of God born a true man. Saving faith is TRUSTING – RELYING on – Jesus for the forgiveness of all our sins – for peace with God – for eternal life in heaven when we die. **Saving** faith is CLINGING to Jesus crucified **and risen** as our ONLY Savior. It's THE CONFIDENCE that Jesus died to take away MY sin – the **confidence** that Jesus rose from the dead and that ***"because He lives, I shall live also."*** Saving faith is GIVING UP on ourselves and CLINGING TIGHT to Jesus. Through that faith **in Jesus** we are in a RIGHT RELATIONSHIP with God – everything is ALL RIGHT between God and us. Through that **faith in Jesus** we have eternal life in heaven.

That faith is not JUST ONE WAY to be saved. It's the ONLY way. Biblical Christianity is **not just** ONE OF MANY ways to heaven. It's the only way. ***"No one comes to the Father except through Me,"*** Jesus said. Or as Paul wrote here, ***"Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame. Yes, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"***

So USE your Bibles! **Use** them for yourselves and with your children. **Use** them to share your Savior with others. We are saved ONLY BY FAITH in Jesus. So is everybody else. God created that faith in our hearts ONLY THROUGH His Word. So God does it for **everybody else**. That's why Christian education and **mission work** are THE JOB Jesus has given His Church. Through His Word God REVEALS **salvation in Jesus** and WORKS FAITH **in our hearts**. So I'll say it again – USE your Bibles! Amen.

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