

The Good News Is the Best News

Romans 10:5-15

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On my 16th birthday, just six weeks after I publicly answered God's call to ministry, my family gave me a Thompson Chain Reference Bible. Now, I had this wonderful library in one binding! In the fly leaf, my mother wrote the inscription: "We hope this Bible will be helpful to you in your ministry. May it serve as a reminder of our abiding love...and our prayerful expectations for your future as you serve the Lord." Signed by all of my family, then this verse cited from Romans 10:15 (NRSV): "And 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!'"

Romans 10:15 is actually a quote from Isaiah 52:7. In ancient days, there was no Internet, telephone, TV, radio. The only way to tell the people back home if a battle had been won or lost was to dispatch runners. These runners were people with skinny legs, clad in baggy shorts, Nike shoes....imagine hundreds of Rod Maples, running up and down the hills of Palestine! And people would see the runner coming from a distance. He grew closer and closer...would the news be good or bad? As the runner approached, he would breathlessly shout, "We won! The King is safe! The kingdom is secure!" And the people would roar approval and say, "Oh, your beautiful feet have brought good news. I could just kiss your feet!"

And this Jesus news is the best news ever. God has forgiven. God has raised Jesus. God is working inside us. Setting us right. Recently, I've had the privilege of sitting in my office, going over the plan of salvation with two different people, reading these very verses, the heart of the Gospel. And I never get tired of doing this! "I love to tell the story; 'Tis pleasant to repeat what seems each time I tell it, more wonderfully sweet. I love to tell the story; For those who know it best seem hungering and thirsting to hear it, like the rest."

The Apostle Paul never got tired of sharing this good news. And he was particularly burdened to reach two groups: Religious folks who are depending on their works to get right with God; and pagans--Romans and others who wanted all their toys, trinkets, distractions, orgies, hobbies and gods. And both groups were confused.

Here's what Paul told the Romans: Reaching God by keeping rules is impossible. Perfection is unattainable; Jesus is not. He is accessible. He is near (vv. 5-8). You don't have to climb up to heaven or crawl down to hell. It's all been done for us. Read vv. 9-10 carefully. We are called on to accept God's gift. There is really only one of two things you can do with a gift--accept or reject it. We are called on to believe. That is not believe as in "thinking about" like we believe the earth is round. It is believe as in trust in, put the whole weight of our being down on something solid. And we confess. That is, whatever is in us always finds a way out onto our lips.

Give me thirty minutes with a stranger on an airplane and I'll tell you what matters to that person.

And note that we are to believe with our hearts. "Heart" in biblical language is not emotion (think mushy, gushy Valentine's Day cards). Heart means the seat of our personality, our will, our choice-factory. So the control panel of our lives commits to Jesus. So it is not emotion. I've stopped worrying about people tell me they don't feel saved. We are not saved by feeling. We are saved by what Christ has done for us.

And note v. 13. We are calling on Jesus as Lord. "Jesus is Lord" was the earliest church creed. And the simplest! The Romans declared Caesar was lord. No. Not our nation. Not a human leader. Jesus is Lord! Lordship implies all of Jesus--his life, death, resurrection and ascension to a place of glory beside God's throne. Lordship means he is boss, in charge and implies repenting and letting go of other lords which have ruled our lives.

So, it's interesting that the Jesus-Word, the Good News is a NEAR WORD, A GOOD FRIDAY WORD, AN EASTER WORD AND A SHARED WORD. That takes us back to that inscription in my first study Bible, the quote from v. 15. How beautiful the feet who bring good news. Pause for a moment and thank God for the person who first shared with you the Good News of Jesus.

John Upton, former president of the Baptist World Alliance, tells a powerful story about a visit to the northeastern part of Ghana, a region that is 87% Muslim, and is the poorest region of Ghana, struggling with high rates of malaria. The Baptist contingent was distributing free mosquito nets. Before they could enter a village, they had to visit with that village's chief. All the village chiefs were Muslim. As they approached one village, the chief granted their request and made a second request. Could they start a church there? He told them Christians, more than any other group he knew, were people of hope and good people. Around a tree, over 150 people gathered as the Baptists told the story of Jesus. Over 100 people indicated they were interested in receiving Christ. They even located leaders to start their new church and the church is still going well. After that first service under a tree, one of the young men pulled at John Upton's arm and asked, "How long has this good news of Jesus been known?" Upton told him 2000 years. The young man replied, "Then what took you so long?" [*Baptist World Magazine*, April-June, 2013, p. 19].