

Romans 10:1-13

Call on His Name

Main idea: There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.

In 2018, several faith groups in Danville, Virginia came together to accomplish a world-record. In a period of 3 days and 4 hours, about 170 people took shifts in reading through the entire Bible straight through. And they did it! In just 76 hours, around the clock, they read through the whole Bible, beating the previous record of 113 hours.¹

So I didn't break any records, but in 2016, during my first 6-week sabbatical, I read through the Bible in a period of 8 days. I would have done it faster, but being by myself, I had to take occasional breaks to do silly things like eat and sleep, but by reading 8 to 10 hours a day for 8 days, I was able to read the Bible from start to finish, and that experience truly changed so much of how I understand the Bible even today.

For example, I noticed several themes in the Bible that I had never noticed before. We'll be talking about one of them today. In Genesis 4:26, we read:

A son was born to Seth also, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord. (Genesis 4:26)

¹ <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/fastest-bible-reading-world-record-broken-danville-faith-community-takes-76-hours-beating-former-113-hour-record/128980.htm>

And that makes sense, right, because after Adam and Eve sinned, and after Cain killed Abel, our sin had now caused a separation between God and man,² and instead of being able to walk and talk with God in the garden,³ now we had to call on His name and beg God for His mercy and grace.⁴

That's when it began. It says that at that time, during the generations of Adam's kids and grandkids, people began to call on the name of the Lord. And we see this theme throughout Scripture, of people calling on the name of the Lord.

The first specific individual that we see calling on the name of the Lord was Abram, who became Abraham. It says in Genesis 12:7-8:

The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. He built an altar to the Lord there, and he called on the name of the Lord. (Genesis 12:7-8)

This happened right after God had promised to bless Abram and to bless the whole world through his Offspring.⁵

² Isaiah 59:2

³ Genesis 3:8

⁴ Psalm 86:5

⁵ Genesis 12:1-3

And much later, when Elijah was a prophet urging the people of Israel to worship God instead of false gods, he said this in 1 Kings 18:

Let two bulls be given to us. They are to choose one bull for themselves, cut it in pieces, and place it on the wood but not light the fire. I will prepare the other bull and place it on the wood but not light the fire. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The God who answers with fire, he is God. (1 Kings 18:24)

So it's like our instinct. Whenever we're in trouble, whenever we're joyful, whenever we need His power and know there's nowhere else to turn, we call on the name of the Lord. That's what the Bible describes as faith, and even that, writes Paul in Ephesians 2, is the gift of God.⁶

So why doesn't God grant everyone faith to call on His name right now?⁷ That sure would make life easier, wouldn't it? And yet, I'm sure all of us have friends and family members who haven't yet trusted in Jesus for salvation. We wish that we could believe for them, but we can't. We wish that we could save them, but only God can save them. So, like Paul, we pray for them, that they would be saved.

Romans 10:1-13.

⁶ Ephesians 2:8-9

⁷ Instead, God has mercy on whom He will, and hardens whom He wills. Romans 9:18

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God concerning them is for their salvation. I can testify about them that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Since they are ignorant of the righteousness of God and attempted to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes, since Moses writes about the righteousness that is from the law: The one who does these things will live by them. But the righteousness that comes from faith speaks like this: Do not say in your heart, "Who will go up to heaven?" that is, to bring Christ down or, "Who will go down into the abyss?" that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. On the contrary, what does it say? The message is near you, in your mouth and in your heart. This is the message of faith that we proclaim: 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. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame, since there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord of all richly blesses all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Romans 10:1-13)

Father, we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord. And we believe in our hearts that You did raise Him from the dead. So we rest in You alone, knowing that we can't save ourselves, and we trust that everyone who calls on Your name will be saved. In Jesus's name, Amen.

In the late 1700's, Daniel Boone explored the wilderness of what's now Tennessee and Kentucky. There's a story about how he often wandered the mountains and forests for months at a time, and his friends back home just assumed he had gone missing. One time he was asked, "Mr. Boone, in all your years of exploration, have you ever been lost?" Daniel Boone thought about it for a moment and replied, "No, I've never been lost; but I was a mite confused once for about three or four days."⁸

It takes a lot of humility to admit that you're lost. But that's one of the ways that the Bible describes us before we came to believe in Jesus.⁹ But the good news is that Jesus stated that His mission in coming was to seek and to save the lost.¹⁰

I mentioned a few weeks back that it's interesting that the Bible never directly tells us to pray for lost people. And yet, it does give us the example of Paul praying for unbelieving Israel. Verse 1.

Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God concerning them is for their salvation. (Romans 10:1)

So we talked about how Paul prayed for the salvation of the Jews, and yet he also knew that the salvation of the Jews was inevitable because God always keeps His promises.¹¹ We'll talk about that again in a few weeks when we get to chapter 11, but for now, I just

⁸ <https://www.family-times.net/illustration/Wilderness/200963/>

⁹ And Jesus made it clear that He would find every one. Luke 15:3-7

¹⁰ Not some of the lost, but *the lost*. Luke 19:10

¹¹ Romans 11:29

want you to notice that Paul earnestly desired the salvation of those he knew would be saved by God. Verse 2.

I can testify about them that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. Since they are ignorant of the righteousness of God and attempted to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes, since Moses writes about the righteousness that is from the law: The one who does these things will live by them. (Romans 10:2-5)

I read a story about a couple who bought an old house in Maine from two elderly sisters. With winter approaching, the wife was concerned about the house's lack of insulation. But the husband stubbornly declared, "If those two elderly sisters could live here all those years, so can we!"

But one night, the temperature plunged to below zero degrees, and the couple awoke to find interior walls covered with frost. In the morning, the husband called the sisters to ask how they had kept the house warm when they lived in it during the cold winter months. After a rather brief conversation, he hung up and told his wife, "For the past 30 years, they went to Florida every winter."

The husband was confident, he had a zeal that they would be just fine during the winter, but it wasn't according to knowledge. Paul says that unbelieving Israel was the same. They had a zeal for God. They received the law with enthusiasm, and thought that since they were given the law by God, they could live up to the

standard that God set for them, but they missed some key points of the law that said otherwise. Like in Psalm 14, where it says:

The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. (Psalm 14:2-3)

So the point of the law isn't that we would justify ourselves, but prove to us that we can't justify ourselves, so that we would look to God to justify us. But instead of relying on God's righteousness, God's grace, the Jews largely sought to make themselves righteous. And in verse 5, Paul quoted Moses in the Old Testament, writing that the one who does these things will live by them.

In other words, as long as you live as if obeying the law will save you, then you're obligated to live according to the letter of the law. And the Bible is clear that that's impossible.¹² We can't save ourselves. We can't rely on our own righteousness, we need to rely on the righteousness of God which comes through Jesus dying on the cross for our sins.¹³ Paul wrote that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

When you place your faith in Jesus, His righteousness is applied to you. Peter wrote it this way:

¹² Galatians 2:16

¹³ 2 Corinthians 5:21

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring you to God. (1 Peter 3:18a)

So righteousness doesn't come through obedience to God's law, but through faith. We believe in the Righteous One, and His righteousness is given to us. Verse 6.

But the righteousness that comes from faith speaks like this: Do not say in your heart, "Who will go up to heaven?" that is, to bring Christ down or, "Who will go down into the abyss?" that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. On the contrary, what does it say? The message is near you, in your mouth and in your heart. (Romans 10:6-8)

Paul was quoting Moses in Deuteronomy 30. As Moses was giving Israel the law, he said this:

This command that I give you today is certainly not too difficult or beyond your reach. It is not in heaven so that you have to ask, 'Who will go up to heaven, get it for us, and proclaim it to us so that we may follow it?' And it is not across the sea so that you have to ask, 'Who will cross the sea, get it for us, and proclaim it to us so that we may follow it?' But the message is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, so that you may follow it. (Deuteronomy 30:11-14)

As you study Scripture, don't be afraid of asking hard questions of it. When I read this passage, I noticed that Moses seemed to be making the exact opposite point that Paul was making. Did you

notice that? In verse 11, Moses said to the Israelites, “This command is not too difficult.” Moses seemed to be saying, “Hey, I’m giving you the law, and it might seem overwhelming, but you can do it!” And then Paul quotes this text in Romans 10 while saying, “You can’t do it!” You can’t establish your own righteousness by obeying the law.

But if you dig a little more, you find they were actually making the same point. You see, when Moses gave Israel the law from God, the common thought at the time among other nations was that in order to be able to please the gods, you had to engage in long journeys and painful toil to discover spiritual mysteries. And even then, you couldn’t be sure that you found the truth. That’s why so many of the pagan nations had so many gods and idols. They were hedging their bets. But then Moses declares to them, “No, this is the truth! It’s right here, very near you. It’s not beyond your reach.”

And then Paul, using this text, makes the same point about Jesus, who is the Word of God. He’s not far from you. He’s very, very near you.

You see, because of our sin, we perceive this separation between God and man. And it’s true that we won’t experience the full blessing of God’s presence as long as we’re in a state of unrepentant sin¹⁴. And yet, it was even while we were in a state of unrepentant sin, while we were yet sinners, that God demonstrated His love for us, and Christ died for us.¹⁵

¹⁴ We can’t please God or be rewarded by Him without faith. Hebrews 11:6

¹⁵ Romans 5:8

So don't say "Who will go up to heaven," as if you need to achieve something to earn salvation, like you could bring salvation down yourself. That's what the people tried to do when they built the Tower of Babel.¹⁶ They sought to build a city in the heavens in order to make a name for themselves, rather than calling on the name of the Lord. But God doesn't desire that we make a name for ourselves. He desires that we call on His name. We didn't bring the Christ down from heaven, He came down of His own accord because He loves us.¹⁷

Also, don't say, "Who will go down into the abyss," as if we could save the Savior from hell. As if our Savior even needed saving. I think what Paul is saying is that we sometimes think that we need to jump through a bunch of hoops and do a lot of good deeds in order to be saved.¹⁸ But the Bible is clear that God is the One who sent Jesus down from heaven, and God is the One who raised Jesus up from the dead. We can't save ourselves by saving the Savior. The Savior came to save us! And He's not far from any one of you. He's very near you. The confession is right on the tip of your tongue, in your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it. End of verse 8.

This is the message of faith that we proclaim: 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. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame, since

¹⁶ Genesis 11:4

¹⁷ John 10:18

¹⁸ Salvation comes first, and then good works proceed out of rejoicing in God our Savior. Ephesians 2:8-10

there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord of all richly blesses all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
(Romans 10:8-13)

So this theme about calling on the name of the Lord is so important because this is what saved people do. Whether Jews or Greeks, Americans or Chinese, Russian or Ukrainian, there's only one name under heaven by which we must be saved, and it's the name of Jesus.¹⁹

It's interesting, then, that most Jewish believers refuse to say God's name. Did you know that? God revealed His name, Yahweh, to Moses in Exodus 6:3. God told him:

I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but I was not known to them by my name 'the LORD.' (Exodus 6:3)

You see how "LORD" is in all caps? That's how just about every English Bible translates that word, but it's actually not a translation at all. It's a placeholder for God's name because most Jewish believers considered God's name to be too holy to speak aloud. But there's no command in the Bible that says we shouldn't say His name, in fact, there are many commands that we should call on His name.

And as Paul quoted Joel 2:32:

¹⁹ Acts 4:12

“Everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh will be saved.”
(Joel 2:32a)

Did you know that the name Jesus actually contains this holy name? The Hebrew form of Jesus is Yeshua, which literally means “Yahweh is salvation.”²⁰ So everytime we say the name Jesus, we’re confessing that salvation is in God alone.

Now, I don’t think that the point of the Bible is merely to get us to say the name of God out loud. In fact, depending on how we say it, it can possibly be taking the Lord’s name in vain.²¹ And yet, when you say, “Jesus is Lord,” and truly believe it in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you’re testifying that you’re saved, because you’ve called on His name alone for salvation.

²⁰ “Ye” is a shortened form of “Yahweh, and “shua” means “salvation.”

²¹ Exodus 20:7