

WE BELIEVE IN SALVATION Romans 10:1-13

Eternity is a long time. It is so long that if you start to try to wrap your mind around it your whole head may quickly start spinning. One person described eternity like this: “If you have a steel ball, solid steel, the size of this earth, 25,000 miles in circumference, and every one million years a sparrow would be released to land on that ball to give it one little peck and fly away, only to come back another million years later for another peck, by the time he would have worn that ball down to the size of a BB, eternity would have just begun”. Beloved, the length of eternity is beyond our ability to comprehend. But there’s one thing about eternity that we can comprehend, and that is, you and I will be in that realm of existence very soon. The moment you draw your last breath, you will step into eternity and never return.

Now, this being true, it is not rocket science to know that to be ready for eternity is an important thing! To be ready for eternity is to experience eternal joy. To be unready for eternity is to experience eternal regret. So today we are going to learn from God’s Word how we can be ready for eternity. And if you are not ready for eternity at this moment, my prayer is that before you leave you will get ready.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to Romans 10:1-13. There is a good Bible word for being ready for eternity, and that word is “salvation”, or the verb form, “being saved”. The word “salvation” means to be delivered from the bondage of sin and the punishment of hell. Salvation is a real spiritual experience that takes place at a point in time, just like any other experience takes place. You were born on a certain day at a certain time. You entered a first grade classroom for the first time on a certain day at a certain time. You kissed your sweetheart for the first time at a certain place at a certain time, and you still remember the experience, don’t you? I certainly remember my first little smooch from Janice. How could I forget it? I’d been building up enough nerve to kiss her for five and a half years. Now, I don’t remember much after that. I was riding home in a glory fog all the way from Janice’s apartment on Jack Warner Parkway back to Reform. I felt like Paul. I thought I’d been caught up into the third heaven. But if you are saved, you were saved on a certain day at a certain time. You may not remember the exact time and place, though most people do. But it still happened in a moment of time. And in our text Paul gives one of the clearest teachings on salvation in the entire Bible. And this morning I want us to dissect it and understand it as well as possible.

Now, there are four truths involving salvation that we see from our text, and the first truth is the fact of our **mortal dilemma**. Look again at verse 1. Paul says, “My heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved”. Back in ch. 9:3

he says, "For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh..." In other words, Paul said that he was almost to the point of wishing that he could go to hell so the Israelites could go to heaven. That is pretty strong language. But that's because of the dilemma that Israel was in. They were lost in their sins and desperately needed to be saved.

Did you know deep, deep down in your soul is the desperate need to be saved? Solomon writes in Ecc. 3:11, ".....He has put eternity in their hearts". Deep down in your heart God has put the knowledge that you will live somewhere forever. And deep in your soul is the desire to avoid eternal punishment and gain eternal life in whatever form you think it exists. But the point is, God says in verse 1 that man has a **mortal dilemma** he must deal with, and that is, he is lost and needs to be saved. And here is a point that you must understand – **there is no middle ground**.

Occasionally I will be witnessing to someone and will be using a little tract called "Steps to peace with God". In it there is an illustration of a huge chasm with a plateau on either side. One side represents saved people and the other lost people. The chasm has a huge cross in it that bridges the gap between the two sides. And under the illustration the question is asked, "Are you here, or here", meaning, which plateau are you on. Are you with Christ or without Christ, are you saved or lost. And sometimes someone will say to me, "I'm in the middle". Now, I know what they mean. They mean that they know their need of Christ and are moving away from their old life and toward Him but have not yet trusted Him. But the truth is, friends, there is no middle ground when it comes to salvation. You are either saved or you are lost. You are either on the road to heaven or on the road to hell. If you are drowning in a lake, you may be thinking about climbing up in a boat that's come to rescue you, but until you climb in you are still in the lake drowning. And it is the same way with your salvation. Your thinking about trusting Christ is not good enough. Until you repent of your sins and trust in Jesus, you are still lost, and it is the most critical concern in your life.

I must admit that I wasn't expecting what I saw just a little over two weeks ago. I was preparing some brief remarks for our 9-11 service about the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers. And during that preparation I saw some YouTube footage that I hadn't seen when the attacks occurred ten years ago. One segment was an interview of the wife of one of the casualties. She described her cell phone conversation she had with her husband just a few minutes before he died. They both knew what was about to happen. So they told each other that they loved one another and hung up. And that was it. Can you imagine the pain in that wife's heart at that moment?

But what was worse was the gut-wrenching scene of people hanging out of windows on the floors above the fires, desperately trying to get away from the flames and the smoke. And then the most horrific part of it all – people began to jump out! They began jumping out of windows 70, 80, 90 stories or higher. But as this unbelievable nightmare began to unfold, the only thing that was on the minds of all who witnessed it was, “How can they be saved?” Friends, we all have issues to deal with in life. Teenagers have dating issues and parent issues. Adults have dating issues, and marital issues, and child issues, and financial issues, and health issues. Oh, but dear friend, the greatest issue of your life today, no matter what else you are dealing with, is the issue of your soul!! Where you will spend eternity. And if you have not made your calling and election sure, God calls out to you in His Word, “Behold, now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).

But not only does Paul write about a **mortal dilemma** that all of us face, he also speaks of a **malicious deception**. Look again in verses 2-3. Paul says that the Israelites were zealous in their faith. They were committed. They were serving God with all of their hearts. But they were deceived! And here was their deception. Get this. They thought that they could measure up to God’s requirements for righteousness. They thought that they were good enough to earn their salvation. But oh, but how sadly they were mistaken! For verse 3 says they were ignorant of just how righteous that God was. They did not see Him as holy, spotless, sinless. Over and over the OT tells us that God is holy, that is, He is perfect. But somehow Israel missed it. They also missed what Isaiah wrote about their spiritual condition. Isaiah says, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness is as filthy rags, and we all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away (Is. 64:6), but they missed it. They missed what David wrote in Psalm 14:3 when he said, “There is none that does good, no, not one”. They missed what Ezekiel said when he wrote, “The soul that sins, it shall die” (Ez. 18:4). They missed what Habakkuk wrote in Hab. 2:4, “For the just shall live by his faith”. Not good works, but by faith. And notice in the last part of verse 3 what they failed to do as a result. Underline it. It is key. It is why people miss heaven. Israel thought that their good works made them righteous, **so they did not submit themselves to the righteousness of God**, to God’s true plan of salvation.

Friends, to compare your righteousness with God’s is like comparing a muddy football jersey with a spotless wedding gown. Tell me, who is going to let you in a wedding reception to congratulate and hug the bride when you’ve just left your muddy football game? You are filth and she is spotless. Friends, that’s the picture of Israel’s righteousness right up close to God’s. But Israel felt that their righteousness was at least in the same ball park as God’s, and that it was good enough for them to at least squeeze through the side door to glory. What a malicious deception!! God is love,

but God is first and foremost holy. And Israel's sins would bar her forever from God's perfect Heaven. There must be another way besides their own goodness.

But beloved, it is no different for you and me. This malicious deception is still as strong now as it was 2000 years ago. Bible teacher William Newell told of seeing a Muslim in a Cairo mosque kneeling in prayer, with his forehead on the carpet, for four hours. When's the last time you prayed for four straight hours, on your knees with your face on the floor? That man was doing all that he could to please God, and thought that he was. But he was just as lost as if he had been out drinking and womanizing for the last four hours. What a malicious deception!

But friends, you can find this malicious deception, which is actually Satan's deception, much, much closer to home than Cairo, Egypt. Did any of you read the front page article of your Alabama Baptist this week (9-22-11)? The headline was "A Designer Society". And the essence of the article was that we live in a culture where people create their own God. And why not? We customize our coffee at Starbucks, we customize our potato at McAllister's, and so what's wrong with customizing God? And here's the good part about it. We can still call ourselves Christians. But the proof of this mindset was a survey by George Barna, who asked American adults how they felt about seven fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith. Beliefs that we've been studying the last few weeks, such as the infallibility of the Bible, the reality of the Trinity, and the deity of Christ, and His atoning death for our sins. And Barna's findings were shocking. For of all the people surveyed, only 7% believed all seven fundamentals of our faith. Many of them would say, "There are many ways to God", and yet they would still say, "I'm a Christian".

Dear friend, please listen! Zeal for God is not enough to be right with God! Israel was zealous, but Israel was lost. Suppose you are taking an exam to become an air traffic controller. But somehow you got ahold of an old book to study with outdated regulations. But you learned them perfectly, and on a quiz in the back of the book you answered every one of them right. But when you took the real test, you got everyone of the questions wrong. So you go up to the administrator and explain your dilemma. You learned the wrong information. Will he say to you, "Why, that's alright son. You tried your hardest. I'll still give you a job. You start directing air traffic tonight". No! Well, it is no different with God. It does not matter how strongly you believe what you believe about God. If it is not what this Book teaches about God, it is a **malicious deception**, and you will miss heaven unless you forsake it and submit to the righteousness of God.

And that brings us to our third truth about salvation today. We've seen Satan's **malicious deception**, that a man, woman, boy, or girl can somehow make it heaven

by their good works. But now let's take a look at God's **majestic design**. If it is true that we can never earn our salvation by our good works, then what is God's plan? Look again at verse 4a. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness..." Friends, God's majestic design for salvation can be summed up in one word, and that word is "Christ". Christ is the end of all of man's puny, futile efforts at making himself right with God and worthy of Heaven. This is Paul's great theme in the book of Romans. He writes in ch. 1, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ...for in it the righteousness of God is revealed" (verses 16-17). He writes in ch. 3, "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed...through faith in Jesus Christ..." (verses 21-22). He writes in ch. 5, "...those who receive ...the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ" (verse 17).

You see, before the foundation of the world, God looked down through the annals of time and saw you and me and all of mankind dying in our sins. He saw us hopelessly lost, and without His intervention destined for eternal destruction. And God's heart was broken in His love for us. And so God did the only thing that He could do – He sent a substitute to pay the penalty of our sins. Do you remember Ezekiel's words? "The soul that sins, it shall die". We all deserve death and hell. But Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrated His love for us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". Jesus did what Paul could not do. Paul could not die for the Jews, though he said that he was just at the point of wanting to. But Paul was a sinner just like they were. He could not be their Savior – he needed a Savior himself. But Jesus needed no Savior. He was the holy, perfect Son of God! And He was a worthy, sufficient sacrifice for your sins and mine. And He willingly laid down His life in your place and mine. And today God is saying to a lost, dying world, "Do you want to be right with me? You can be, but there's only one way. It is not through your righteousness, but through the righteousness of My Son. He is my free gift to you".

Now, to believe that Jesus and His righteousness is God's free gift to you is essential, but it is also essential to understand how we receive this precious gift. For as Spurgeon said, there are many who fancy that they are saved, and they are not. But God makes it very simple in vs. 9-10 of our text. Let me break this down for you if I may. In both verses Paul mentions two elements of salvation – confession and belief. Verse 9 gives the order that Moses gave the children of Israel in Deuteronomy concerning the laws of God they were to keep – they were very near Israel, in their mouths and in their hearts. That is, they were easy to understand. But verse 10 gives the natural order of the two. First, in order to be saved you must believe in your heart that Jesus was God's Son Who died for your sins and rose from the grave, and then you must trust Him alone as your Lord and Savior - you must depend on Him alone to save you. And then, Paul says, you will confess Him with your mouth before men.

Now, there are those who teach that you are not saved until you make this public confession, that it is actually a part of your salvation, and some say that it must be by baptism. But this is not true. We are saved by faith alone! Paul writes in Gal. 3:26, “For you are all son of God **by faith in Jesus Christ**”. Jesus said, “Most assuredly I say unto you, He who **believes in Me** has everlasting life” (John 6:47). That’s about as plain as you can put it. But what we need to understand is that confession is a natural consequence of true saving faith. In other words, when the God of the universe, Who died for you on a cross – when that God comes into your life and washes your sins away and snatches you off the road to hell and places you on the road to heaven – you just can’t keep silent about it!! You have to tell someone the good news!

Now, I must say another word about salvation here. Salvation comes through faith alone, resulting in confession of that faith. But with true salvation, that is not the end of it! True salvation will manifest itself in holy living. Paul wrote, “If you will confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus”. That means that you declare that Jesus is your Master, your Ruler. That means as you trust Him to save you that you pledge to **obey Him**. Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

But friends, the world is full of people who say they love Jesus but couldn’t care less about keeping His commandments. And do you know why? It is because the love of Jesus is not really in them. They went through the motions of parroting a sinner’s prayer. They may have even been baptized. But there was no real change in their hearts and no real change in their lives. They have no interest in hearing the Word of God. Sermons bore them to tears and they never read the Bible at home. They occupy themselves with nothing but their hobbies, or worse, fill their minds with nothing but smut from television or the internet every day. They love to spread rumors and harmful truth about anyone any chance they get. Some of them commit adultery. But they will be in their place in Sunday School and worship every Sunday. Jesus used a word quite a bit to describe these people. Hypocrite. They profess Christ, but do not possess Christ.

Now, friend, I’m not saying that we are perfect after we are saved. But we are different! The Bible says, “If any man be in Christ he is a new creation. Old things are passed away. Behold, all things become new”, 2 Corinthians 5:17. And in that same book Paul admonishes his readers, “Examine yourselves. Prove yourselves, whether you be in the faith” (2 Cor. 13:5). And if I’ve just described the way you live from day to day, week to week, you need to ask yourself, “Have I really been saved?”

Well, we’ve seen that all of mankind has a **mortal dilemma**. We were at one time lost, or we are still lost, and need to be saved. We’ve seen that there is a

malicious deception in this world, a Satanic deception, that says we may be saved by our own good works. And we've seen God's **majestic design** for our salvation, which is faith in Jesus Christ His Son. But let us see finally from our text a **marvelous decree**. Look at verse 4 again. What a decree! Christ is for everyone who believes. And it is such a marvelous decree that Paul repeats it three more times. Look at verses 11-13 with me again. Oh, friends, if you are lost, put your name in those verses. Jesus is saying to you over and over and over this morning, "I love you and I will save you if you will but come to me and ask".

You say, preacher, it can't be that simple. Oh, yes it is! Look back up at the middle of verse 8. God says that He has placed the word of faith near you, in your mouth and in your heart. All that you have to do is say, "Lord Jesus, as best as I know my heart, I believe. I believe that You died on the cross and rose again for me. I turn from all of my sin, and I now trust you as my Lord and Savior. Thank you for saving me".