

Meeting the Challenge
Romans 10:13-17
September 10, 2017

Americans are a people who love a challenge. We love sports of all kinds. We love to cheer for the underdog. We love the challenge of trying to be the best. We are fascinated by stories of people who have overcome tremendous adversities. Television programs like Survivor and Biggest Loser have thousands of followers who enjoy watching other people take on challenges. Some people get very involved in programs like American Idol or America's Got Talent.

The church of Christ also has challenges. Scripture talks about the challenges the church faces. Not all challenges are the same. In the church's challenges, there is more at stake than being thrown off an island. There's more to lose than a competition on America's Got Talent. Also, we are all supposed to be involved in overcoming the challenges the church faces. The challenges of the church are both great and small. However, the most important challenge the church faces is described in today's text.

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

In these few verses, we find the primary challenge for the church of Jesus Christ. We've read these words. We've had these words read to us. But I wonder how often we have taken this passage apart so its full impact comes home for us. That's what we are going to do today.

This challenge has two important features. First, we have the message. We have the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have the good news of salvation. Just a few verses ahead of today's text, St Paul tells us this: *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. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved*

(Ro 10:9-10 NIV).

The opening verse of today's text says: *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* No other religion can offer salvation because salvation cannot be earned it is the gift of God. Salvation comes from the grace of God, and there is no other road, there is no other door that leads to salvation. We have the message of salvation. We have the news that Jesus saves all who believe in him.

The other important feature of this challenge is the world has the masses. There is no

limit on who may be saved. St Paul used the word everyone: *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* Everyone means there are no exceptions. Jesus is an equal opportunity Savior. Salvation is not based on race or gender. Salvation is not based on how important you are, how many friends you have, how big your house is, or what zip code you live in.

At the present time there are around 7 or 8 billion people in this world. Of that number, probably only 1 or 2 billion have faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. That means 5 or 6 billion people are in serious need of the Gospel message. But, all is not lost. Paul tells us that every one of those people, who are without Christ, are available to be saved.

We have the message the world is dying to hear. We have the one and only roadmap to a real relationship with God. We have the answer for the salvation of the world. The challenge now becomes how will the world hear the Gospel?

Paul asks some questions to help explain how the challenge of saving the world must be met. He asked these questions in the context of the Jewish people of his day. However, these questions and their answers still apply today.

Our context, Farmington Hills, needs to hear the good news of forgiveness and eternal life. Our context, Oakland County, needs to hear the good news of forgiveness and eternal life. Our context, America and the whole world, needs to hear the good news of forgiveness and eternal life.

Paul's questions bring out the challenge facing God's church; the challenge of getting the message to the masses. Let's take a good look at those questions.

How can people call on someone they don't believe in?

Salvation hinges on faith in Jesus Christ as one's Lord and Savior. There is no other way. Jesus clearly said: *I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me* (Jn 14:6 NIV).

That means the Africans in the rainforests of the Congo have to have faith in Jesus Christ to be saved.

That means Romanians in the mountains of Europe have to have faith in Jesus Christ to be saved.

That means Hondurans in the jungles of Central America have to have faith in Jesus Christ to be saved.

That means Japanese in the metropolitan areas of Tokyo have to have faith in Jesus Christ to be saved.

That means those neighbors who live across the street from you have to have faith in Jesus Christ to be saved.

That means the people you brush by in Wal Mart or Hartland or the mall have to have faith in Jesus Christ to be saved.

There is no short cut to salvation, no alternate route. According to St Peter: *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved* (Ac 4:12 NIV).

How can people believe in someone they've never heard about?

The world needs Jesus Christ to be saved, but consider the billions of people who don't know that – 5 or 6 billion. With so many religions and non-religions in the world today, the world is in a state of spiritual confusion about God.

The only way the world can know the Gospel is to hear the Gospel. If they never hear, they can't believe. Consequently, if the world needs Jesus and only Jesus for salvation, then the world need to hear that message, plainly, clearly. The last verse of today's text tells us: *Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*

We've determined the world can only be saved through faith in Jesus Christ. We've determined, if they can only be saved by faith in Jesus, they need to hear about Jesus. We've determined what the world needs to hear is the Gospel, the Word of God.

So, Paul asks the logical question; How can people hear unless someone tells them?

This is a crucial link in the chain. The world is full of people who are lost and have no idea how to be saved. These people need to hear the Gospel because saving faith comes by hearing the Word of God.

We, as the children of God, have been entrusted with that saving Word. We have exactly what it takes to lead someone from darkness to light. We have the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The heart of the matter, then, is for those with the Gospel to tell those who are without it.

How can someone tell them unless they are sent to the ones who need to hear?

Those who have the message of salvation must be sent to the ones who need to hear it. They have to go and tell people they need what they don't have. They have to go and tell people who may not even know what they are missing. People need Jesus and Christians must be sent to tell them. Bottom line: The challenge is to get the Message to the masses.

How do we meet the challenge?

Today, billions of people are on the fast track to hell. They are going to spend eternity

suffering the ultimate punishment for sin. What is God's will for these people? 1 Timothy 2:4 *God our Savior ... wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth* (1 TI 2:3-4 NIV). How does God plan to accomplish this? According to Paul, missionaries must be sent to spread the Gospel.

Who are the missionaries of the Gospel? Every Christian has been personally commissioned by God to carry his message of salvation to the lost. Listen as I read your commissioning: *Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age* (Mt 28:19-20 NIV).

If you consider yourself a Christian, then this commissioning is for you, personally. Jesus lived, died, and rose to give you that message to take to the world.

This is a big world and there are billions people thousands of miles away. This is a big world and there are countries around the globe with names we can't pronounce. But this big world, this overwhelming mission field, begins just on the other side of our church doors. You have been commissioned to be God's ambassador to everyone you come in contact with. You have been called to meet the challenge, and I pray you will do just that.