

February 25, 2007
Lent 1

"God's Saving Word Is Always Close to You"

ROMANS 10:8-13

But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: ⁹ That 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. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. ¹¹ As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-- the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³ for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Last Monday we heard the good news that three climbers who had fallen over a ledge on Mount Hood in Oregon had been rescued. The climbers huddled together in the raging snowstorm under a tarp, wrapped up with sleeping bags and with a dog, a large Labrador mix named Velvet lying on top of them. Some said it was the dog that contributed to their survival by keeping them warm at night. What helped the most was a handheld radio transmitter that sent out a signal. The signal led the rescue team to the exact location of the fallen climbers.

The book of Romans describes people who are hopelessly lost in a deep crevasse of sin, foolishly thinking they can rescue themselves by their own righteousness. They even reject God's plan to rescue them when it is offered as a free gift. Imagine a news report telling us that the rescue team finally found the lost climbers, but they refused to be helped. They wanted to make it out on their own. How many people do you know who are still trying to make it on their own as if somehow their own righteousness is acceptable to God?

How far away is this righteousness of God that is a free gift in Christ? How much effort do we have to expend to find it? Do we have to climb to the heights to bring Christ down, or descend into the depths to bring Christ up? Do we need a special radio transmitter to find it? No! Paul tells us the word of God is near to us. It is on our lips and in our hearts. The Word of God rescues us by bringing Christ's righteousness to us and leading us to trust in it.

God's Word has come close to us

What amazes us about God's Word is how it comes so close to us and how it plants itself into us and how it works faith in us, even when we do not want to be rescued. "But what does it say? 'The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart.'" God's Word has come into your life and become part of your life. When you were sinking down it was God's Word that convinced you how bad your situation was. Paul said of his Jewish people, "They are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge." Think of someone deep down in an icy crevasse, with sheer walls of ice going up a hundred feet, foolishly thinking they can climb out of this situation on their own. So what if my leg is broken? So what if

I don't have climbing gear. So what if I am 60 years old and never climbed on ice before. I can make it own my own. I don't need to be rescued.

All of us thought this way when we came into this world. We had a zeal for righteousness, to do the right things to make ourselves acceptable to God, but we never realized how far these attempts would fall short of God's glory until God's word came near to us, and entered our hearts and become a solid confession on our lips. God's Word leads us to cry for help, even admitting our own weakness and unworthiness. "Merciful Father in heaven, I am altogether sinful from birth. In countless ways I have sinned against you and do not deserve to be called your child."

God's Word also reveals to us the clear path to being rescued and saved. All religions of the world pretend to offer you a way to be saved from the deep pit into which you have fallen. Climb up the sides, hold onto the rocks, brace yourself against that wall, pray to Allah, get your marriage sealed in a temple, follow the golden rule, try and do your best and hope in luck for all the rest.

God's Word shows us Jesus coming down to rescue us. He rescues us by taking every sin you every committed upon himself, suffering for that sin with the torments of hell itself. He showed perfect kindness and love to people. He obeyed his heavenly Father perfectly because he wanted to robe you in his righteousness. This whole amazing rescue plan is laid down clearly in God's Word and placed in your heart and put on your lips. How beautiful this rescue plan is portrayed for us this morning in the banners that Jim Moore has made for us! Even a small child can appreciate the words "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life."

God's Word brings you saving faith in Christ Jesus your Lord

When God's word comes into your life and comes close to you to rescue you, it leads you to confess that Jesus Christ is your Lord and God. "That 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." There are certain basic truths a person needs to believe and confess to be a Christian. You need to believe that Jesus Christ is Lord and God. Do you believe this? Do you believe that a child was born in Bethlehem from the Virgin Mary who was and is Lord and God from all eternity? Do you believe that Jesus is who he says is, the Son of God, equal with the Father, the great 'I am' of the Old Testament? If that is what is in your heart believes this morning and is also a confession that emerges from your lips, then dear friend that means the Word of God has changed your life and you a Christian. Believing Jesus Christ is Lord and God is foundational to the Christian faith.

And let me ask you another important question. Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross and then rose from the dead? Do you believe he rose from the dead with a physical body, appeared to the disciples, even showed them his hands with the nail marks still on them. My friend, if this is what is in your heart and also on your lips, then you are a believer. Jesus said of the people to whom the word comes, "Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed." And John wrote of Jesus' miracles including the resurrection, "These are written that you believe that Jesus is the Christ and that by believing you might have life

through his name. The bodily resurrection of Jesus is foundational to the Christian faith. 1 Corinthians 15 says, "And if Christ has not been raised your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." Believe Jesus bodily rose from the dead and believe he is Lord and God and you are rescued from the deep yawning pit of eternal death and punishment.

Paul tells us, "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth you confess and are saved." God's Word is so important in your life because it justifies you and saves you. To justify means to declare not guilty. It does not mean "make right or make not guilty" as if this were a process that is gradually being completed in your life. Romans 4:25 says about Jesus, "He was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification." When your heavenly Father saw that Jesus made the perfect sacrifice for your sin to remove the offenses, he showed he accepted the sacrifice by raising Jesus to life again. The resurrection declares you "Not Guilty!" The word of God brings this truth into your life and makes it real to you. It leads you to believe and trust in this proclamation of "not guilty."

In his commentary on the book of Romans Dr. Donald Barnhouse tells the story of preaching in a large church in Philadelphia that had a balcony or gallery. He preached on God's deliverance being a "done deal" not a process. He used numerous Bible verses to make the point. As he preached he noticed a twelve year old boy in the balcony holding onto the railing totally absorbed in the message. He closed the sermon summing up the verses with one sentence saying, "Our sins are forgiven, forgotten, cleansed, pardoned, atoned for, remitted, covered; they have been cast into the depths of the sea, blotted out as a thick cloud, removed as far as the east is from the west, remembered against us no more, cast behind God's back." At the end of the service as he was greeting the people, the boy came down the steps from the balcony, tugged at his sleeve and said, "Good sermon, Doc. We sure are sittin' pretty aren't we."

Notice the past tense. It does not say, "For it is with your heart that you believe and will be justified." It says in the past tense, "For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified." "And it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved." As Romans 5 says, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Or as 1 John 5:12 tell us, "He who has the Son has life." It is the Word that comes and shows us how we are rescued through Jesus. It is the Word that comes close into our lives and leads us to believe in something that we ordinarily would consider to be foolishness and nonsense.

God's Word is meant for all people

But who does God want to rescue with his Word? Only a handful of people? No! God wants his Word to go out into the whole world, including the people you know in your life that are still trapped in sin and unbelief. Paul goes back into the Old Testament to show how the Lord God wants his Word to reach all people. "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." Notice the emphasis on "anyone." There is no difference between Jew or Gentile, "The same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him." Notice the word "all." "Everyone" who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Notice the emphasis on "everyone."

Imagine for a moment that when the climbers were lost on Mount Hood someone said we cannot rescue these people because they are from a different country and they do not deserve to be rescued, or they are too old and they don't deserve to be rescued, or they are not that smart so they don't deserve to be rescued, or they weren't wearing the latest most fashionable clothes, or they did not have the right color of skin or hair. If that made the news, just think of how upset people would be.

God has given his Word for all people. He has placed that word into our lives so we can believe. He also gives us that Word to us so we can take it to other people who are still down in the crevasse of eternal death and punishment. Jesus told us to preach the gospel to every creature, and make disciples of all nations by baptizing and teaching. Later in this chapter it says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the gospel of peace."

Your whole worldview has been changed. You see people all around you who are desperately in need of being rescued. Some are crying out for help. Others don't want to be bothered because they think they can make it out on their own. We close with a prayer we have often prayed in this congregation.

"Lord God, You know the challenges we face in a world that does not want You. Place Your hand of blessing on Your servants and make us bold to proclaim Your pure Word. By Your Holy Spirit lead many to know Your Son, Jesus Christ, the only hope of salvation. Amen."