

Getting What We Do Not Deserve! Romans 9:30-10:13 Matthew 5:17-20

Portions adapted from "Standing Right With God" by Dennis Davidson @ sermonCentral.com

In 2010, Billionaire art dealer, Forrest Fenn hid a bronze chest containing over \$2 million in gold and jewels somewhere in the western Rocky Mountains and published 9 riddle clues on where to find it. The goal, Fenn has said, was to get people off the couch and into the wilderness, and tens of thousands have accepted his challenge, writing back to Fenn with tales of their harrowing attempts and regretful failures to find that bronze box. According to Fenn, while a few treasure hunters may have stumbled to within 200 feet of the stash, as of 2017, no one has yet found it, and sadly three seekers have lost their lives searching for it.

Now contrast that with a couple, in 2014, out walking the dog on their rural property in Northern California – old gold-rush country - who stumbled upon a trove of rare, mint-condition gold coins buried in the shadow of an old tree. Nearly all of the 1,427 coins, dating from 1847 to 1894, are in uncirculated, mint condition; some of them are so rare that coin experts say they could fetch nearly \$1 million apiece; a priceless treasure found for which they weren't even looking.

In a similar way, Romans chapter 10 talks about two different ways of finding an even more precious treasure – the righteousness of God - which allows one to live in an eternal relationship with God; what our Bible calls, "being saved."

One way is the hard working legalistic way. It's the way of zeal for traditions of law and man. It is a way that follows rules, regulations for holy living; and I dare say that countless millions have died seeking God's righteousness in this way. The other way of claiming the righteousness of God is placed right out there in the open for anyone and everyone to stumble upon; indeed it is a treasure that God wants us to find. But it involves **faith, trusting in God to do what He has said He will do.** You have to believe, and accept for yourself that the Son of God, out of his own personal riches, has already paid the price necessary to credit you with God's righteousness and bring you into a living relationship in the family of God. Like Paul, I pray that many many people will stumble upon, rather than over, this treasure and get what we do not deserve; "being saved"

This is what Paul is writing about in Romans chapter 10. He opens the section by again expressing his deep desire and prayers that his own Jewish people would stop stumbling over Jesus their Messiah in their quest to claim their own righteousness. For as he said, they have a zeal for God but it is a misdirected zeal, it is unenlightened, (they are looking for God's righteousness in all the wrong places).

And Paul well understands unenlightened zeal, having long lived the same way. Like so many in the church world today, he had this great desire to follow the law of God, but in a totally misdirected way he thought it was how he was earning his rank in heaven.

Yes undeniably Saul/Paul had had a great zeal for God. He had stood by, holding the coats in approval of those who stoned Stephen for following that heretic Jesus. I wonder what he thought as he watched Stephen die from the rocks bruising, breaking his body, and heard him joyously shout, "*I see the Heavens opened and Jesus is standing at the right hand of the Father.*" (Acts 7:56). How could anyone die so peacefully and be so certain of the truth?

It was about this time that Saul rode towards Damascus with great zeal to carry out his duties as an enforcer of Jewish tradition, to arrest and imprison all followers of this rebel rabbi Jesus. He even carried letters authorizing his actions from no less than the High Priest of Israel. Zeal is a wonderful thing, but only if that zeal is aimed in the right direction. There was no one more zealous for God than Saul, but his was a self-righteous zeal and not a zeal under the control and direction of Scripture or the Holy Spirit. And in this way his zeal became a deadly weapon destroying the lives of other people.

Which brings up a vital point for us to consider. There are many "religious" people in the world that have all kinds of "zeal" for God. Terrorists, in fact, gladly give their lives in zeal for Allah. But their zeal is misdirected – they are missing key information about God which makes their zeal worse than useless, it makes their zeal deadly.

And even those of us who know Jesus as our Lord and Savior can fall into this trap – we let our excitement and exuberance outpace our wisdom, knowledge of scripture, and the Spirit of God. Zeal rightly directed is a good thing – Jesus said "*zeal for my Father's house will consume me.*" (John 2:17). Fervency, excitement, being "on-fire" for God – these are good things. In fact, the word zeal means "to heat up." I pray that we could all become more zealous for our faith.

But how do you know if your zeal is being rightly directed, or not?

I would suggest this simple test: Ask yourself, is what I am now zealous about based on the revealed will of God as found in His Word?

One of the biggest mistakes Christians make is believe that they should do something God has never authorized them to do in His Word. The other huge mistake is to think God has given them a "new revelation" that goes beyond the written Word, which they then place above the Word of God. That's how we got some of the cults we have out there today, that's how we got some of the strange doctrines that run around the church, and that's even how we get well intended Christians damaging other Christians in the church.

**ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God,
and seeking to establish their own,**

they have not submitted to God's righteousness.

**For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be
righteousness for everyone who believes.**

Romans 10:3-4

The Jews of Paul's day were definitely zealous in fulfilling the law but as he wrote that which should have led them to faith in God, and to recognizing their Messiah when he came, they had transformed into a works for salvation program.

Because, as we earlier learned, the law never could, never was intended, to save anyone. Yes, it was given both to enforce and teach moral behavior, but it was also meant to teach us that we could never keep it perfectly. And the only way to be declared righteous by the law is to keep it perfectly. Because the law is an all or nothing proposition; break even one of the smallest laws and you become a law breaker. Break even one of the smallest of laws and you know you have fallen short of God's righteousness.

Falling short of God's required righteousness, is the thought that drove Martin Luther to his desperate study of the book of Romans. The Catholic Church of Luther's day taught that the least unrepented, unconfessed, sin could doom you to centuries in purgatory, if not the eternity of Hell itself. The young fearful monk literally wore himself and his confessor out trying to remember every last sin he might possibly have committed – such as the sin of pride for not having committed any other sins the previous day. That is what Paul meant by saying..

Moses writes concerning the righteousness
that comes from the law, that "**the person
who does these things will live by them.**"

Romans 10:5

Mirrors are useful things, they show you whether or not you have combed your hair or washed your face. But, seeing dirt on your face, you do not use a mirror to wash your face, you find soap and rag with which to wash yourself clean – then the mirror will reflect the reality of your now clean self. **That is what the law is – a mirror – it was designed to show us our uncleanness so we would turn to God and find cleansing.** The Holy Spirit that God sends into our life is the spiritual soap and rag that He uses to cleanse us of our sin, our dirt; which is what we mean by being baptized;

we are being cleansed as we are immersed within the Spirit of God. God promises us this, as He promised the Hebrew nation long ago, through the prophet Isaiah...

though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be like snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.
Isaiah 1:18

There was only one man who ever kept the law perfectly, and in doing so was able to offer his complete fulfillment of the law, his righteousness, to all who would receive it. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, *Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes*, (Romans 10:4). The word translated "end" in our Bible could also and perhaps better be translated, "fulfilled" or "completed." The law still serves us as a good mirror, but it no longer condemns as sinners those who have found and claimed for themselves the righteousness of God as found in Jesus.

And this helps us to understand a strange comment about the law that Jesus made right in the middle of his Sermon on the Mount (which is the second text we read today: Matthew 5:17-20). The Jews of Jesus' day called him a "law-breaker" because he was not living by many of the additional rules they had piled on top of the original commandments.

I have come not to abolish [the Law or the prophets]
but to fulfill. ... I tell you, **unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**
Matthew 5:17-20

The Jews of Jesus' day were hyper-religious. They were zealous in practicing their religion. They added over 600 laws to the original moral codes of Moses. Can you believe that some people claimed to have kept them all. As he later wrote to the Philippian church, Paul once thought of himself this way, as "*blameless before the law*" (Philippians 3:6).

So how could anyone's righteousness exceed these self-declared, most self-righteous Scribes and Pharisees? Simply, by putting your faith in the only person who completely and fully did fulfill all the requirements of the law. Paul concluded his testimony to the

Philippians saying that all his zealous law keeping that he once was so proud of, before he met Jesus the Messiah, he now counted as "rubbish" compared to what he found in Christ.

that I may gain Christ and be found in him,
not having a righteousness of my own
that comes from the law, but one that comes
through faith in Christ,
Philippians 3:9

Where are you with regard to the righteousness of God, are you still back there with the Jews of Jesus day, *ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish [your] own?* If you are, you have my deepest sympathy. There is only one way to obtain the righteousness of God, and that is to ask for it and trust that Jesus has provided it for you.

Let's take a moment to think about the Jews of today. As long beforehand prophesied, – shortly after Jesus death, in 72 A.D. Jerusalem was overrun by Roman armies, their Temple destroyed, and the Children of Israel dispersed around the world; as God warned they would be if they rejected him. Yet up until now, through 2,000 years of persecution and prejudice, they have kept their identity as a distinct people. Many would say this is miraculous, but as we will learn, in Romans chapter 11, God is not yet finished with Israel as a nation; He still has promises yet to fulfill for them, and He is keeping a remnant of Abraham's physical descendants safe – through whom he can fulfill those promises.

Many of us know very little about today's Jews, the descendants of the people we love to read about in the Bible. There are an estimated 14.2 million Jews now living in the world today; finally, 70 years after the Holocaust, reaching back close to the population they had before 1945. Still, Jews make up less than 1 percent of the Earth's population, with the largest number, about 8 million of them, living in North America.

Through 2,000 years of Post-Israel history the Jews as a people have suffered horrible persecution from their surrounding non-jewish neighbors much of it done in the name of Christianity. So you can guess that their original rejection of the Messiah has now been underscored by centuries of hatred they have received at the hands of his so-called followers; making it even more difficult these days for Jews to accept Jesus as their Messiah; it would take a miracle. But thankfully God is into miracles. According to Jewish mission groups there is a quiet revival growing among these people. There are now approximately 350,000 Messianic Jews worldwide who recognize Jesus as their Messiah. They have 438 Messianic congregations in the United States and surprisingly over 100 in Israel. God is watching over His remnant.

But, what will happen to Jewish people who believe in GOD but do not believe in Christ? Since they faithfully worship the same God, won't they be saved? If that were true, Paul would not have worked so hard and sacrificed so much to teach them about Christ. **Because Jesus is the most complete revelation of God, we cannot fully know God apart from Christ; and because He appointed Jesus to bring God and man together, we cannot come to God by any other path.** The Jews, like everyone else, will find salvation only through Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). As a Messianic Jew, Paul knew this and grieved over their lost spiritual condition. So great was his burden he even expressed the wish that he himself might be "accursed from Christ" if that would result in their salvation (Rom. 9:2,3). For all the hard-headed, hard heartedness of the Jewish people, Paul would not stop praying for them and longing for their salvation.

Perhaps we Bible-believing Christians need to reflect this same attitude of the apostle Paul, who had a deep love for his fellow Jews. He longed for them to discover, as he had, that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the Savior of all people from all nations. Perhaps we need to share Paul's burden by adding the people of Israel - and certainly our own neighbors as well - to our prayer list; joining with Paul in pleading with God "*that they may be saved*" (Romans 10:1). For the experiences that Israel had with God provide the foundation, the history, the very roots that we now grow upon (something else you will learn from chapter 11).

Which brings us to this closing thought. Moses said that those who would be righteous before the law must *live by the law* (Romans 10:5) Plain and simple, this means, if you want display your rightness by the law you have to obey the entire law – every single bit of it perfectly! Good luck with that. Only one person has been able to do it so far – and you won't be the next!

Think about this, contrasting salvation by the law versus salvation by faith: on the day the law came down from Mount Sinai, three thousand died (Exodus 32:28). On the day the Spirit descended, three thousand were saved (Acts 2:41). Legalism in your life, in our churches, or in our communities will always lead to death because no one can fulfill its righteousness. The Spirit in your life, in our churches, in our communities, on the other hand, will always lead to life because of the finished work of the Cross. [Jon Courson, Application Commentary. Nashville, TN : Thomas Nelson, 2003, S. 958].

As to the righteousness that comes by faith, Paul – again quoting Moses – says the *word is near you, on your lips and in your heart* (10:8),

because if you confess with your lips
that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart
that God raised him from the dead,
you will be saved.

Romans 10:9-10

Back to those two treasures we mentioned at first. In spite of his nine clues, the thousands of people who have spent seven years looking, and the eight books written about this quest, no one has yet found Fenn's treasure; but then again, he did not intend to make it easy to find. And about that California couple? Having found the stash of gold coins, they were very careful not to let anyone know where it was found or even that they were the ones who found it. They kept a few pieces for souvenirs, sold the rest off on Ebay through third-parties, all the while remaining completely anonymous. They are keeping the finding of this treasure as their own secret, because they like the life they are living and wish to continue doing so, they don't want their neighbors to think differently of them, and they definitely don't want their property overrun by the next modern gold rush. All of which is quite understandable, because if they did talk about the treasure they had found, their life would never be the same again.

But what about this treasure of righteousness that so many people are desperately seeking yet we have found without even trying; freely getting what we have never deserved; the righteousness of God paid for and given to us by Jesus, God's son, our savior. **How dare we not talk about it! Believing in our heart, calling upon the Lord – that has already changed our life forever!** How dare we not share that "Jesus is Lord" – at no further cost to ourselves – with our desperately seeking neighbors. Make no mistake, we live in the midst of a spiritual war, this is the treasure that Satan has worked tirelessly to hide from those who remain lost. So many people continue to stumble over Jesus, because just as has been done for centuries, false Christians – the Devil's front line soldiers – have continued to foul that name of Jesus whenever they can. And through our fearful silence they have greatly succeeded. So much so that our formerly Christian based culture now thinks of Christians as judgmental, narrow minded: haters. And if we keep this treasure secret, to ourselves, how will they ever learn otherwise. How will they ever hear the true story of God's love. It's up to us to share this treasure, by our words gently spoken, by our gracious deeds, by our life lovingly lived for others As Paul will urge us at the close of this letter, ***Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*** (Romans 12:21).

There, you have the summary of Chapter 10, what we Gentiles never looked for we found – or I should say it found us – for God has always intended on including the Gentile nations within his family of faith. As scripture says, "*No one who believes in him will be put to shame.*"

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek;

the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Romans 10:12-13

The divine obligation of witnessing rests, without exception, upon every child of God. Regeneration demands reproduction in kind and the fruit of a Christian is another Christian. (Shepherds don't make sheep. Sheep make sheep.)

So be joyously brave about the treasure you found; ask God to give you the words to say and to put you in the path of those who continue to seek Him. WHY? BECAUSE JESUS STILL SAVES !