

Hearing the Word of God

Romans 10:16-21

Introduction

In our world – there is seemingly no end to particular viewpoints on God / religion / the afterlife

Our position: ‘Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life . . .’

The Christian is one who brings glad tidings / good news to the world – there is a Savior

If Christianity is such great news – why are not all people Christian?

Romans 10 seeks to address this when it refers to the Jewish response to the gospel of Jesus Christ

Romans 10:16 - 'However, they did not all heed the glad tidings.'

Many of the Jews rejected the Christian faith / did not believe

Dinesh D’Souza is a Christian apologist who debates atheists. One individual he has come to know thru these debates is Michael Shermer – the editor of *Skeptic* magazine

Shermer’s story is an interesting one - he had converted to the Christian faith as a young teenager – attended Pepperdine University – [a Christian college] participated in evangelism outings in the LA area as a college student. Now Shermer says that he wished he could take back any of the literature he distributed at that time – writes against the Christian position

D’Souza says the roots of Shermer’s unbelief came out in one of his debates with him

Shermer’s story - during his college years he was dating a young woman who got into a serious car accident – which broke her back - and left her paralyzed. Shermer described the days that he spent at the hospital praying to God that He would heal her – and the healing never came.

Shermer was shaking a little as he told the story and then a look of firm resolve crossed his face – ‘That was it’ – he told the audience – ‘I was done with God’

The roots of Shermer’s atheism lay within his own personal anger towards God

If God would not heal her – then Shermer would not believe in Him

On the other hand – we have stories – like that of Lee Strobel – who was an atheist - - - and converted to the Christian faith

Lee shares that in his BC days he was a man filled with much anger and hatred:

How can I tell you the difference God has made in my life? My daughter Allison was 5 years old when I became a follower of Jesus, and all she had known in those 5 years was a dad who

was profane and angry. I remember I came home one night and kicked a hole in the living-room wall just out of anger with life. I am ashamed to think of the times Allison hid in her room to get away from me.

Five months after I gave my life to Jesus Christ, that little girl went to my wife and said, "Mommy, I want God to do for me what he's done for Daddy." At age 5! What was she saying? She'd never studied the archaeological evidence [regarding the truth of the Bible]. All she knew was her dad used to be this way: hard to live with. But more and more her dad is becoming different.

This morning – Paul will explore the roots of Jewish unbelief - - - while also pointing us to the central role of faith when it comes to our salvation

I. Faith by Hearing - vv. 16-17

We have seen that God sends out his messengers with the word of God to a world that needs the Savior

God commands all everywhere to repent and to believe the gospel

Paul points to the reality – that not all have heeded the glad tidings!

He quotes from Isaiah 53 – the clearest expression of the gospel / and substitutionary atonement perhaps in the entire OT

Isaiah 53:1 - 'Lord - who has believed our report?'

Who has believed our message? [NASB]

Paul points to the fact that the problem with Israel is not that they have never heard of Jesus

Paul once told King Agrippa when speaking about Jesus - - - 'This has not been done in a corner' – Acts 26:26

The crucifixion of Jesus was a big deal

And when the Apostles went forth with the news of the resurrection – they went to the Jews first

They heard the message – but they did not heed it – they did not put their faith in Christ

Consider – even one of the twelve – Judas Iscariot – consider the privileged position he was in

Judas saw most of the miracles worked by Christ – He was there at the feeding of the 5000 / He was there when Jesus walked on water / He likely witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus

Thomas Goodwin: 'Judas heard all Christ's sermons'

*** However – he did not truly believe

It's not enough to hear the message – or even see the miracles

Hearing alone – does not save - - - but hearing with faith

Hebrews 4:2 - 'For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the Word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.'

Galatians 3:2 - 'This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?'

We are reminded of the crucial role of faith in our religion

God gives us a promise – we take it by faith

John 11:25 - 'Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies.'"

Faith is essential to the Christian worldview of heaven / future glory for the believer

No faith – no glory

When the Virginia Tech tragedy unfolded back in 2007 - - - 32 students and faculty were killed by a deranged gunman – a community was reeling from the shock

Many people had questions about God / life and death / morality / evil / Satan

Dinesh D'Souza wrote an article pointing to certain realities in the aftermath of the shooting.

One thing he noted was that in all the memorial services / funerals - - - every single service referenced or featured God in some way as being the source of comfort and hope thru such trials in this life – not one atheist sermon was given nor one service conducted from an atheist perspective. D'Souza pointed out that that is because atheism provides neither consolation or understanding in the face of evil or tragedy.

It has nothing to say to it – no hope to offer the living

As a result – he received a flood of e-mails from atheists calling him a jerk / a cretin – one who exploits tragedy. However – no one seriously challenged his point.

When you try to understand this world – you won't understand it better thru any other lens than the one of the Bible and the Christian faith

v. 17 - - - Faith comes by hearing – faith grows by putting ourselves under the Word – and receiving it / not resisting it

I Peter 2:2 - 'Like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.'

Thomas Watson: 'It was by the ear, by our first parents listening to the serpent that we lost paradise; and it is by the ear, by hearing of the Word, that we get to heaven. "Hear, and your souls shall live." (Isaiah 55:3)'

Adam and Eve listened to the wrong voice / the wrong message – and went astray

I Peter 1:23 - 'you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is thru the living and abiding Word of God.'

The gospel is pictured as a seed planted in the soil – when it is received into a heart that surrenders to it in faith - - - it leads to new life / being born again

Satan still tries to trip people up today

John MacArthur: "There are those who are actually afraid of the will of God. I will never forget the athlete who came up to me at Hume Lake Camp and said, 'I'm not sure I want to give my life to Jesus Christ because I am afraid of what He will make me do.' He had the idea that God wants to take robust athletes, break both their legs and make them play the clarinet. This implies that God is a kind of cosmic killjoy, stomping on everyone's fun and raining on everyone's parades.'

Surrendering to the gospel: is to choose life over death / forgiveness over guilt / truth over lies / heaven over hell / goodness over evil / it's to stop running from God and start walking with Him in fellowship

The response of faith to the message: 'I believe that – that Jesus died on the cross for my sins and rose gloriously from the dead'

MLJ; 'Every Christian ought to be like a messenger coming over the top of the mountain with good news for people who have not got it.'

We also see the importance of the church / the missionary / ss teachers / preachers

Faith comes by hearing

Cross-cultural missions is God-ordained

Some have slandered the idea of missions as a form of Western Imperialism

Who are we to tell these other cultures how to live / what to believe?

Mark Twain made that argument on one occasion

Mark Twain: 'To my mind the Christian missionary is easily the most criminal criminal that exists on the planet, & the lowest down in the scale of malefactors.'

He says – how would we like it if some Chinese came over here and sought to convert our sons and daughters to Buddhism - - - some Muslims from Saudi Arabia / etc.

The glad tidings are for all people

Some who don't believe today – may come to believe tomorrow or next year – or ten years from now – but they must hear the message of Christ crucified

James Dobson shares of his grandfather's conversion late in life – [he had lived his whole life rejecting the gospel] – the wife had prayed for him for years

At 69 years of age, my grandfather suffered a stroke, and for the first time in his life he was desperately ill. One day his daughter came into his room to clean and straighten. As she walked by his bed she saw tears in his eyes. No one had ever seen him cry before.

'Daddy' – what's wrong – she asked.

He responded, 'Honey – go to the edge of the stairs and call your mother.'

My grandmother ran to her husband's side and heard him say, "I know I'm going to die, and I'm not afraid of death but it's so dark. There's no way out. I've lived my whole life through and missed the one thing that matters. "Will you pray for me?"

"Will I pray?" She had been hoping for this day for 40 years. She fell to her knees – and the intercessions of 40 years seemed to pour out through that bedside prayer. Then R.L. Dobson called upon the Lord and gave His heart to Christ

During the next two weeks he asked for people to come whom he had offended – and asked for forgiveness from them. He concluded his affairs and then died with a testimony on his lips.

69 years old - - - Don't give up on people – continue to pray / to lift them up before the throne

A Bible distribution ministry had contacted a church [in the Grinnell area] about the possibility of their helping to financially participate in the distribution of the Scriptures. The response given back by the pastor was somewhat shocking

She wrote:

'If we were to participate in, or support, an effort to place scriptures in various places throughout the world, we would seek to place scriptures that are sacred to the majority of people in that area (e.g. the Koran in predominantly Muslim countries).

i.e. – we don't care to get the Bible to people in Muslim countries – we would give them the Koran

That is shocking! Where are the glad tidings? The beautiful feet of those who bring good news?

Her view is not new – it's *religious pluralism* – all religions are equally true or valid - - - so to distribute the Bible to people of other faiths is not only offensive but unnecessary for their spiritual well-being

Her view is a train wreck of logic and cultural sensitivity

Gregory Koukl [a Christian apologist] points out the contradiction:

Gregory Koukl: 'First, if all religions are true, then Christianity is true. Yet - a central claim of classical Christianity is that other religions are false when taken as a whole. Clearly Jesus was not a pluralist. Either Christianity is correct that Jesus is God's Messiah for the world and other religions are deceptions, as Scripture teaches, or Christianity is false and some other view is true. In no case, though, can all religions be true and valid.'

i.e. – you can't have it both ways

If you accept the claims of Christ who said: 'I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.' - - - then you automatically reject other religious claims to be the way to God

Cross-cultural missions is not only a good idea – but is essential and vital – for the good of all peoples and to the glory of God

II. God's Plan - vv. 18-21

Israel has had plenty of opportunity to hear the gospel

In fact – the early Apostles gave priority to reaching the Jews first with the good news

They cannot say they have not heard

R.C. Sproul shares that on the night he committed his life to Christ - - - so did a friend of his.

That night – they both wrote letters to their girlfriends – telling them of their newfound faith

However – the next day – Sproul said that his friend had completely repudiated the gospel message he had supposedly embraced the night before.

For Sproul – his life was changed forever – but his friend went back to his old ways

His friend did not truly believe

He heard the *exact same message* – but ultimately rejected it

When it came to Jewish unbelief

God said – this is how the Jews will respond to the message [vv. 19-21]

The Jews – by not believing are simply showing the Word of God to be prophetically true

Sproul: 'Why should anyone be surprised that the Gospel is being proclaimed among the Gentiles? This was not a last-minute switch in God's plans. God had told the people of Israel that He would make them jealous by taking their proffered benefits across the border to all nations.'

God had told Israel thru Moses of His plan to save Gentiles – and that Jews would be provoked to envy by the sight of Gentiles finding God

Moses announced that God would one day make Himself manifest to Gentiles who were not seeking Him - - - and give His blessings to them - - - while leaving the Jews in their willful rebellion and unbelief

vv. 20-21 - - - God says that He was found by those who weren't even seeking Him

C.S. Lewis was an atheist who converted in England – he was running from God

C.S. Lewis: "You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of

1929 I gave in, and admitted that *God was God*, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.

He was running from God – but God got a hold of him in His grace

That's what the unbeliever is doing in this world – running from God / going off to the far country / indulging the lusts of the flesh and the vanities of the world

Gentiles who were not seeking God have found the redemption which Israel rejected

What was the pagan world doing when Jesus Christ came on the scene?

They were worshipping the gods of Greek mythology - - - in every major city – there was a temple to some deity – Aphrodite in Corinth / Zeus in Athens / Hercules in Rome / Artemis or Diana in Ephesus

They were having sex with temple prostitutes

They indulged in homosexuality – the Caesar's were immoral wretch's

They were idol worshipers / practicing witchcraft

Remember when Paul spoke at Ephesus – some of the pagans began burning their magic books – coming to Christ

One of the idol manufacturers in Ephesus became furious with Paul – because his idol making business took a hit

He stirred up a riot of the people saying – 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians'

They were ignorant

God says that He will be found by those who did not seek Him

They were not looking for God - - - but the gospel came and God poured out His Spirit upon them

Sometimes God will reach down and pluck a brand from the burning – melt the heart of stone

God is portrayed as reaching out His hands all day long to rebellious Israel

For many of the Jews – to embrace Christ would undo their whole religious system – and destroy their own delusions of self-righteousness [they would have to admit they are sinners in need of saving right along with Gentiles!]

They loved the darkness

If we hate the light – and continually blow out the candle - - - we can't blame God for leaving us in the dark

John 8:12 - '[Jesus spoke], "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Conclusion

C.S. Lewis portrays the mystery of faith in one of His Narnia books - - - where the older girl [Susan] – after some years chides the other children for still talking about all the things they did and saw in Narnia [i.e. she no longer believes]

Susan does not enter Narnia with the others at the end of the series. It is left open ended about her fate

C.S. Lewis – apparently was asked about her by one of his readers

Lewis: "The books don't tell us what happened to Susan. She is left alive in this world at the end, having by then turned into a rather silly, conceited young woman. But there's plenty of time for her to mend and perhaps she will get to Aslan's country in the end.'

Just as in real life – every stiff-necked obstinate / rebellious unbeliever – may come to repentance - - - as long as they are in the land of the living – or God may leave them to themselves

William Lane Craig – referred to one such hardened sinner who did repent

William Lane Craig: 'He was a rabbi, a Pharisee, a respected Jewish leader. He hated the Christian heresy and did everything in his power to stamp it out. He was even responsible for the execution of Christian believers. Then suddenly he gave up everything. He left his position as a respected Jewish leader and became a Christian missionary: he entered a life of poverty, labor and suffering. He was whipped, beaten, stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked three times, in constant danger, deprivation, and anxiety. Finally - he made the ultimate sacrifice and was martyred for his faith at Rome. And it was all because on that day outside Damascus, he saw Jesus our Lord.' [Reasonable Faith, p. 283]

Of course – he was speaking of Saul who became the Apostle Paul

Why did the Apostles suffer?

They were showing us for all time and eternity - - - the tremendous value of the gospel – so much they were willing to suffer and die for it

John Piper: 'The supremacy of God's worth shines through the pain that His people will gladly bear for His name.' [Matt. 5:10-12]