

No More Ladders

10.12.25

Message 39

Romans 10:1–13 (CSB)

10 Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God concerning them is for their salvation. ²I can testify about them that they have zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³Since they are ignorant of the righteousness of God and attempted to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to God's righteousness. ⁴For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes, ⁵since Moses writes about the righteousness that is from the law: **The one who does these things will live by them.** ⁶But the righteousness that comes from faith speaks like this: **Do not say in your heart, "Who will go up to heaven?"** that is, to bring Christ down ⁷or, **"Who will go down into the abyss?"** that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. ⁸On the contrary, what does it say? **The message is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.** This is the message of faith that we proclaim: ⁹If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation. ¹¹For the Scripture says, **Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame,** ¹²since there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord of all richly blesses all who call on him. ¹³For **everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.**

Introduction

A. Romans 9-11 are challenging.

1. I want to give us some advice.
2. When the passage is hard to read, keep reading till you find the Gospel.

B. Romans 9 focused our attention on God's sovereignty.

1. God works actively in human history, hardening hearts, speaking through prophets, and bringing His plans to pass.
2. Romans 10 is the other side of the coin: Human responsibility.

C. The Gospel includes both God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

1. But when we make it all about us, and what we can do, we miss the mark, we miss heaven.
2. Too often we are so busy building ladders that go nowhere instead of believing in Jesus and receiving salvation by faith.

Israel is lost.

A. We have to keep in view that this passage was first about the Jewish people.

1. They are lost and heading to eternal death.
 - a. They had the promises, the covenants, the LAW, and all the blessings.
 - b. But they rejected the very one that all of this spoke of.
 - c. All of the miracles of the Old Testament, all of the promises, all of the altars, and all of the sacrifices pointed to the most important event in history: the arrival of the Messiah.
2. But when He came, they stumbled over Him and were put to shame.
3. It's like spending all of your life and family fortune for a wedding.
 - a. It was to be the grandest and most important event in your family's history.
 - b. Then, when the day came, the family told the groom to go home.
 - c. The wedding preparations were so beautiful, the venue perfect, the music awe-inspiring, and the cake was the best cake ever.
 - d. But the family fell in love with the preparation, the planning, and the dream of a wedding, and when the day came, they had no real love for the groom.

B. The Jewish people LOVED the idea and trappings of God.

1. They loved the Law.
2. They were zealous for all the covenants, the details, and the religion.
3. But they did not recognize the Messiah they had been preparing for.
4. They had righteousness, but the wrong one.
5. They had zeal, but without knowledge.

Zeal without Knowledge is Dangerous.

A. The Jews were zealous.

1. Meaning they had a lot of passion and energy for what they believed and did.
2. They were passionate about keeping the Sabbath, but it was their version of the Sabbath.
3. They were passionate about tithing, even down to the grains of their spices, but it was their version.
 - a. They were working very hard to keep pure, to be righteous.
 - b. But their version of righteousness had no room for a suffering Messiah, a crucified and resurrected Lord, or for a Christ that looked as plain and unassuming as Jesus did.

B. A little bit of information can be dangerous.

1. Especially when that knowledge is surrounded by a lot of energy.
2. This is common to all of us, especially in today's time.
 - a. Anyone with time on their hands, a camera, and some confidence can distribute information online.
 - b. Keyboard warriors on social media who read one book and now have just enough information to be wrong.
3. This is true for new believers:
 - a. A person is radically saved and start reading their Bible.
 - b. They read a passage and without fully understanding it start making bold declarations or decisions that aren't in line with all of Scripture.
 - c. This is especially dangerous in today's environment with instant messaging.
 - d. YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok offer compressed and compelling content, some of it good, and it sparks something in us without giving us a foundation to prove it or to add to that knowledge.
 - e. The next thing you know, you are zealously doing things, pursuing a righteousness that isn't God's but your own.

C. The Pharisees were zealous, they were passionate, they were motivated, but they were running in ignorance of what really matters.

1. Verse 3 says they are ignorant of the righteousness of God...
2. They thought they were experts about God's expectations, but instead, they were zealously ignorant.
3. Don't be zealously ignorant.
4. Zeal is breaking down doors you were designed to walk through.

D. Be zealous, but not ignorant.

1. When men read this, we might be tempted to temper the zeal.
2. Don't be less zealous, be less ignorant.
3. Men, you are far more capable concerning spiritual things than you want to admit.
 - a. You lead large, complex organizations, building and rebuilding machines, you've memorized technical specs and scorecards, you identify and diagnose engines by sound, and you expertly call in turkey.
 - b. Then you buy the lie that says, "I'm too dumb to understand the Bible and spiritual things?"
4. Don't sacrifice either zeal or knowledge: grow in both.

When we are ignorant of God's righteousness, we become experts in our own. Vs. 3

³ Since they are ignorant of the righteousness of God and attempted to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to God's righteousness.

A. The Jews were ignorant of the righteousness of God.

1. So they filled the vacuum with their own righteousness.
2. They established their own standards, their own measures, and their own program.
3. Everyone has their own righteousness or standard, but not everyone has God's.

B. We do this ourselves.

1. When we bless what God has cursed, we have our own righteousness, our own rightness.
2. We champion our own version of goodness and morality, but fail to recognize that no one is good apart from God.
 - a. The goal is not to be a moral person, but a follower of Jesus.
 - b. I'm afraid there are people in this room who are moral but not saved.
 - c. You are a good person, you treat others fair, you work hard, you love your family.
 - d. But you have never submitted your life to the Lordship of Jesus.

C. Notice verse 8b and 9.

This is the message of faith that we proclaim: ⁹ 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.

1. Moral, good, and kind are not what get us to heaven.
 2. This is the fruit, the product, but not the method.
 3. We are saved, we are made truly righteous, when we declare and crown Jesus as Lord of our lives.
 4. My friends, don't be a good, moral person who goes to eternal death.
- D. Some of us feel like we are going to heaven because we have earned it.
1. According to our standard, we deserve eternal life.
 2. We don't cheat or steal, we don't drink to excess, we don't do this or that.
 3. We are experts in our own righteousness and ignorant of what God really requires.

A Different Kind of Righteousness

A. The Israelites had established their own righteousness.

1. Their righteousness is a lot like a ladder:
2. A way to climb closer and closer to God.
3. Our righteousness feels the same way, just more modern.

- a. We go to church on Sunday, we take a step.
 - b. We give in the offering, another step.
 - c. We do the right sacrifice, another step.
 - d. We miss a Sunday, we stay still.
 - e. Two Sundays, we lose, and so forth.
4. We do this until we reach God or we fall off.

B. But the Gospel is not a ladder to be climbed.

- 1. It is a loving Father who scoops up the child and places the child on his shoulder.
- 2. It is the Father stooping down, instead of making the child climb to the top.
- 3. When man modifies religion, we end up with man made steps:
 - a. Steps that may be hard or almost impossible, but manageable for the elite.
 - b. But the Gospel is not about the steps of man, but the steps of God.
 - c. The God who came down, to be born in human flesh, Immanuel-God with us.
 - d. The God who climbed down, descended to hell, to preach the Gospel to the captives.
 - e. The God who ascended to heaven to prepare a place for us.

C. This is the difference between the Law and Faith.

- 1. The Law says: If I do this, I will live.
- 2. Faith says: I don't have to go to God because He has come to me.
- 3. In Genesis 28, we have an interesting story often called "Jacob's ladder."

Genesis 28:10–16 (CSB)

¹⁰ Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ He reached a certain place and spent the night there because the sun had set. He took one of the stones from the place, put it there at his head, and lay down in that place. ¹² And he dreamed: A stairway was set on the ground with its top reaching the sky, and God's angels were going up and down on it. ¹³ The LORD was standing there beside him, saying, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your offspring the land on which you are lying. ¹⁴ Your offspring will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out toward the west, the east, the north, and the south.

All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. ¹⁵ Look, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

¹⁶ When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.”

4. I share this story to point out this truth.

- a. Jacob never climbed the stairway or ladder in the vision.
- b. God’s angels were going up and down.
- c. Jacob/Israel never touched it because God himself came down to him.
- d. Law and religion say climb the ladder and see how far you can climb.
- e. Gospel says you don’t have to climb because the Lord is standing here beside.

Believers, not ladder climbers.

Notice verse 10

Romans 10:10 (NLT)

¹⁰ For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved.

A. Faith and belief involves the whole person.

- 1. Works are not concerned with our hearts.
- 2. As long as the action is right, the heart doesn’t have to be engaged/
- 3. Faith and belief involve our whole being.

B. The action of the heart leads to righteousness

- 1. The action of the mouth leads to salvation.
- 2. We need both in our relationship.

C. The Great Commandment is to love God with all of your heart, mind, and soul.

- 1. The whole person, the whole being.

2. It is designed to be a relationship where nothing is held back.
3. This is where many of us struggle
 - a. It's sometimes easier to give God my money instead of my time.
 - b. I can give God my mind, but my heart trails behind.

D. The Good News is that I don't have to go to heaven to bring God down. Romans 10:6-8

⁶ But the righteousness that comes from faith speaks like this: **Do not say in your heart, "Who will go up to heaven?"** that is, to bring Christ down ⁷ or, **"Who will go down into the abyss?"**, that is, to bring Christ up from the dead. ⁸ On the contrary, what does it say? **The message is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.** This is the message of faith that we proclaim:

- a. I don't have to descend to hell and wake Jesus up to come up out of his grave.
- b. In the story of Jacob, it was God who came down.
- c. When Moses was called to the Mountain, God came down upon the mountain.
- d. The sin of the Tower of Babel was the belief that man can ascend to God and bend Him to our will.

E. But the Gospel in Romans 10 says Jesus is as close as my lips.

1. When I call upon the name of the Lord, I am saved.
2. When I cry, Lord, have mercy, mercy flows.
3. I don't have to go to Lowe's, buy a ladder, and overcome because Jesus is with me now, and He has overcome.
4. He lifts me up and places me where I could never climb.
 1. He picks me up out of my righteousness, which is as filthy rags.
 2. He brings me out of the miry clay and sets me upon the Rock to stay.

Moving from "Good-Enough" to "Jesus is Enough".

A. When we talk about Law, Works, Faith, and Gospel, we are tempted to be overwhelmed by technical language.

1. Many of us disengage, and these wonderful words end up sounding like the teacher on Charlie Brown: Wha-Wha-Wha.

2. So, let's reframe these terms for a moment.

3. How do we become people who stop asking, "Am I good enough" to declaring, "Jesus is enough!"?

B. #1. Engage the whole person.

1. If you are a thinker, like me, engage in activities that engage your mind and your body.

2. If you are a feeler, engage your mind and explore ideas.

3. Lean into what comes naturally.

4. Don't ignore what's hard.

C. #2. Stop trying so hard.

1. People who are hard workers and high achievers or perfectionists by nature are often people who are trying to prove something or earn something.

2. Many of us don't want to feel like a charity case, so we are far more comfortable with transactional relationships.

3. If that's you, I need you to hear this:

a. Stop trying so hard.

b. You can't earn it, and you don't deserve it.

c. You can't bring heaven down or work Jesus up.

d. He is as close to you as your next breath.

4. Jesus is already Lord, resurrected, and ascended to heaven.

a. He doesn't need my help to make that happen.

b. What He invites us to is an unequal relationship.

c. He will always give more than I give.

d. I will always need more than I can provide.

e. But He calls out to us and invites us to believe.

5. Work, obedience, and right living all have a place.

a. But it is all as a response to a love that came first.

- b. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- c. All who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.
- d. What I do is not to earn Christ's love but in response to it.

Illustration: Ethan Smith and Roan Smith

A. Imagine a terrible world where, for a child to live, they had to climb up into the ceiling and carry their father safely down to the ground.

It's some terrible mix between Hunger Games, Squid Games, and Lord of the Flies where the rules and the methods feel like they are constantly changing. Today it's Roan's turn and he has to reach his dad who is up in the ceiling.

1. We can't do it for him.
2. So what do we do?
3. We get a ladder and make it as steady as possible.
4. Out of our love for the child, we cheer and encourage and cry.
 - a. We could cover the base of the ladder with money, gold, precious gifts, and other things to cushion the fall or to climb on.
 - b. We might go find a different ladder that adds a little extra
5. But no matter what we do, the ladder is unclimbable and doesn't reach high enough.
 - a. Of course, a baby can't climb it.
 - b. But surely as he gets older, he can grow into it.
 - c. But the ladder is designed to always be impossible to climb.
 - d. The height it covers is never enough to cover the distance.
 - e. There is no possible way for this child to accomplish this task.

B. We are really good at building ladders to nowhere.

1. We create religions.
2. We develop the language, the science, the math, that tries to bridge the gap between our humanity and divinity.
3. We know there is more, but it is always out of reach.

4. We build ladders of religion, science, math, productivity, and entertainment and find that while they may give us a few good steps they are never enough to cover the distance between us and God.

C. This child doesn't need a better ladder.

1. He doesn't need a course in climbing.
2. He doesn't need more dedication, devotion, zeal, or even knowledge.
3. What he needs is a loving Father who does what fathers do.
4. All this child has to do to be picked up is to do what every child knows to do: put his hands up.

D. The Gospel is not a ladder to be climbed.

1. It is a loving Father who scoops up the child and places the child on his shoulder.
2. It is the Father stooping down, instead of trying to make the child climb to the top.
3. The Gospel is not a method to better ladders, but a way to a loving Father.
4. The Gospel only asks that we put our hands up to the Father, as a sign of our desire for him.

Prayer: Start Believing.

My prayer for us today is that we all may grasp how great God's love is for us.

- To stop building ladders and to throw our hands toward heaven and cry out from Romans 8, "Abba, Father."
- To stop assuming our righteousness is the same as God's righteousness and start pursuing Him.
- To stop trying to bring Jesus down, but to open our eyes and see that He is near to us.
- The Gospel is in our mouth and in our heart.