

INTRODUCTION

A lot of times, people believe a lot of strange and unique things. I heard about a college professor, who on the first day of a deductive reasoning class, stood before the class and said, "The first president of the United States; the last major league baseball player to bat over 400. Now, class, tell me, what is my name and how old am I?" The students scratched their heads and remained silent. So the professor said, "Class dismissed."

The next day, he said the same thing, "The first president of the United States, the last baseball player to bat over 400. What's my name and how old am I? If you can't figure it out, we're not going to have class until you can figure it out." The third day, the students were just tired, but he said it again, "The first president, the last baseball player to bat over 400. What's my name, how old am I?" One student held up his hand. The professor asked, "What's the answer?" The student said, "I have reasoned your name is George Williams, and you are 44 years old." The professor said, "That's exactly right. Now, tell the class how you figured it out." The student said, "Simple. George Washington was the first president of the United States; Ted Williams was the last baseball player to bat over 400, so I figured that your name was George Williams. Your age, 44, was the easiest part, because I have a brother who's in an insane asylum. He's 22 years old, and you're twice as crazy as he is."

When it comes to spiritual things, sometimes people say things that don't make any sense. This honestly happened: A man was asked, "What do you believe about salvation?" He said, "Oh, I believe what my church believes." "What does your church believe?" "Well, they believe about what I believe about salvation." "Well, what do you and your church believe?" "We believe the same thing."

If I could ask you today what you believe about salvation, you may not have a clear answer. But in Romans 10, we have the clearest explanation of what salvation is. Today I'm going to talk about the two keystone ideas about salvation, the grace of God and our faith.

Romans 10:13-21. "...For everyone who calls upon the name [not just the Lord, but 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 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. (Some Bibles say the word of God. Of course, Christ is God.) But I ask: 'Did they not hear?' Of course, they did: 'Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.' Again, I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, 'I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding.' And Isaiah boldly says, 'I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for

me.’ But concerning Israel he says, ‘All day long, I have held up my hands to a disobedient and an obstinate people.’”

I. GRACE: GOD REACHING OUT TO ME (vs. 13-15)

What does the Bible teach about salvation? First of all, it teaches the absolute essentiality of the grace of God. Do you know what grace is? Grace is God reaching out to me. Look again at verse 21. God says, “All day long I have held out my hands.” Grace is God reaching out to us. I often compare and contrast religion (which has never saved anybody) to true Biblical faith. Do you know what religion is? Religion is man stumbling around in the dark trying to find God; whereas Christianity is God reaching out to us saying, “Here I am, I’m offering you salvation.”

What are parents or grandparents saying when they hold out their hands to their children or grandchildren? They’re saying, “Come to me. I love you so much I want to enfold you in my arms.” But the child has to make the choice to come into those arms. People don’t like forced hugs. We hold out our arms and say, “Here I am. My arms are open to you.” That is what God is saying, “I’m holding out my hands to you, not just for five minutes, not just for an hour, but all day long, all the time, my hands are out to you.”

Since Paul has a logical mind, he logically traces the process of salvation. He goes back to the origin of salvation. He backtracks, beginning in verse 13 all the way through verse 15. Paul is like an explorer who wanders through the jungle trying to find the source of a river, and having found the source, he then follows that river all the way until it pours into the sea.

Here’s the process: There are at least five steps in the process Paul gives.

1. God sends a preacher to sinners

Look at verse 15. It says, “How can they preach unless they are sent?” God is in the process of trying to share something with each one of us, and He does it by sending a messenger, a preacher. For every person who is a born-again believer, someone was sent to you to share that message. It may have been a preacher, an evangelist, a Sunday School teacher or a family member, but someone was sent to you, and God sent that person to you.

When I was in college, I had a discussion with another student who claimed to be a Christian. He asked me what I was going to do with my life, what field of vocation I was going into. I told him I believed God was calling me to be a preacher, and that I was going to be a preacher. I told him I had been preaching since I was 17.

I know this young man meant well, but this is what he said to me, “You ought to do something else, because one of these days, preaching is going to be outdated. The time is going to come when we won’t have preaching anymore because of computers, and advanced technology.” So he said I had better get another job doing something else. I don’t know where he is today, but I’m here before you preaching the word of God. I plan to keep on doing that until Jesus raptures me or I die.

Some people think someday God is going to come up with another method of spreading the word. Friend, preachers were preaching in the 1st century; they were preaching in the 14th century, and if Jesus tarries, we're going to be preaching in the 21st century. There has never been a better way to do it than a man of God standing before the people of God opening the word of God and preaching to the people of God. I use technology, but God still uses this old method. He sends a preacher. That's why he says in 1 Corinthians 1, "God has chosen through the foolishness of preaching to save some."

2. The preacher shares good news

Not everybody who stands behind a pulpit in a church qualifies as a preacher of good news. Why? Because a lot of what you hear today is not very good news, is it? Sometimes it's all the bad news, all the doom and gloom, and you're going to die and go to hell.

There *is* bad news, and the bad news is: The wages of sin is death. God never wanted to focus on the bad news; He wanted to lead you to the good news. Here's the good news. "But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:23. Sometimes people go to church, and the preacher walks up and down their back then they walk out feeling bad and say, "We really heard the gospel today." You might not have heard the gospel; you might be feeling bad because you were just hollered at a lot. True preaching doesn't take place until someone says, "Here's the good news." It's like going to see your doctor, and the doctor says, "You've got cancer; come back in a week." You come back in a week, and the doctor says, "I say unto you again, you've got cancer, come back in another week." You come back, and he says, "I say unto you the third time, you have cancer." You're going to stop going to that doctor. You're going to find a doctor who says, "You've got cancer, but here's what we are going to do about it." We want to know how we can deal with the bad news. That's what the gospel is—good news. The good news is God loves you. The good news is that Jesus loves you so much He died for you. The good news is if you turn from your sins, place your faith in Jesus, surrender to Jesus as Lord, you can be saved. That's the good news. I'm happy to share it with you today.

By the way, do you know who qualifies as a preacher of the good news? It is not just somebody who wears a suit and stands at the front and has been to seminary. Any person who takes the good news of salvation to somebody qualifies as a herald of good news.

Look at verse 15. I love that quotation from Isaiah. It says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who proclaim the message of good news." Most of you know my wife and I love to go to the beach. We love to walk on the beach. We love to sit out under an umbrella, reading and listening to the waves. While we are sitting there, and a lot of people walk by in front of us. You would be amazed how many people stop and look at me and say, "Those are the prettiest feet I've ever seen. Hey, Mark, come take a picture of this guy's feet." No, I have never had anyone say that my feet are pretty. In fact, my wife says they're ugly. This verse is not talking about anatomy; it's talking about activity. It means when someone goes to take good news, it is a beautiful experience. It means this morning, after I prayed with some of our deacons, and I walked down the hall to this room to share about good news with you, you could have looked at me walking along and said, "That's beautiful, because he's going to take the good news." When you share

the good news with somebody, others can point at you and say, "That's beautiful because they're going to take good news to somebody."

It's like when you're an expectant father, and the doctor walks into the maternity ward. As he walks over to you, you anticipate a beautiful experience because you know he's coming to tell you, "Congratulations, you're a father." That's the way we ought to respond, because when somebody takes good news, it's a beautiful experience. How beautiful are the feet of people who preach the gospel." We need more preachers.

A little kid said to me, "I want to be a preacher when I grow up." I asked, "Why?" "So I can stand up and yell at people," he replied. We don't need people to stand and yell. We need people to take the good news to people.

3. The hearer believes or rejects the message

That's the choice. God says, "The hearer believes or rejects the message. Here is salvation; here's the truth. I'm offering it to you, and I want you to hear it, but you must also believe it, you must accept it. Here it is, take it or leave it." Now, we are hearing today, but are we believing what God says?

4. The believer calls on Jesus

Verse 14 says, "How can they call on the one they believe, unless they hear a message? Faith is active; it's not just something you believe in your head. This verse doesn't say whosoever "thinks" about the Lord will be saved. It doesn't even say whoever "believes" in the Lord will be saved. It says whoever *calls* upon the name of the Lord will be saved. God says, "Here I am, holding out my hands to you all day long, and call me if you need me. Call on me." Calling on God is an active participation on your part where you say, "Lord, I believe you, and now I am accepting what you offer."

5. God saves everyone who calls on Jesus

The fifth step in this process is the simple result. Verse 13 says, "And everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." From beginning to end, salvation is of the Lord. Our only part in it is receiving it, believing it. He does it all. He starts it. He finishes it.

Hebrews 12:2 says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author or finisher of our faith." When it comes to salvation, Jesus is Alpha, Omega and everything in between. He's the A, the Z, he's everything in between. This process seems so simple to me. Verse 16 says not all the people accepted the good news.

I really can't understand how anybody would not accept God's free gift of eternal life. Some people have come up with their own ideas about what religion is and about who God is, and it has absolutely nothing to do with this book. Most of you know who actress Betty Davis was. She had eyes that were big enough you could almost dive into them. She was an outstanding actress, but she had some strange beliefs when it came to spirituality. A number of years ago, she was

interviewed by *Parade Magazine*. She said, "I would hate to die. I'm very religious, although I seldom attend church. Being a working woman, I decided that God would give me Sundays off. I also have a deep belief that most truly religious people aren't found in church. I don't believe in an afterlife. No, I believe we have our heaven and hell here and, then it's over."

That's what she really believed; she was not putting on an act. She has a right to believe anything she wants to believe, and I'm not criticizing her right to believe. The sad thing is she and a lot of other people have concocted in their own minds what they think about truth, what they think about God, what they think about afterlife and heaven and hell. And it's totally separated from the word of God. I'll admit: I'm not nearly smart enough to figure God out. I would never, for one split second, trust my own intelligence to figure out who God is and what He expects of me. Instead, I trust what He says in this book. I've accepted it, and I hope you have, too. That's grace.

II. FAITH: MY RESPONSE TO GOD'S OFFER (16-21)

Let's talk about faith now, because that's the other side of the coin. That's how we respond. That's what faith is, my response to God's offer. Verse 17 says, "Faith comes by hearing the message, and the message comes from the word of Christ." I hope we can learn something about faith, perhaps something new to make our faith lift a little bit and have a little bit deeper faith.

1. Faith is believing what God says

Notice verse 17 doesn't say faith comes by listening. It says faith comes by hearing. That means to *comprehend*. It doesn't say faith comes by reading. It doesn't say faith comes by watching. It says faith comes by hearing the word of God.

I think a lot of folks are hard of hearing when it comes to God. When folks get a little older, sometimes they get hard of hearing. I heard about the couple who had been married over 50 years, and neither of them could hear as well as they used to. The wife turned to the husband one night and said, "Honey, I'm proud of you." He turned to her and said, "I'm tired of you, too."

I think sometimes when God is speaking, we just can't hear or we're not listening. Sometimes people come to a church service and say to me, "You know, Pastor, my problem is I just can't hear what God is saying." I want to say to them, "Hello, the word of God is right here."

When the word of God is read, when it's taught, when it's preached, it is God speaking. Don't expect to hear some audible voice thunder down from heaven's loudspeakers. Don't expect God to write a personal message across the sky in letters a thousand miles high. He's talking to you right here. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ, the word of God.

In verse 17, the word for "word" is *rhema*, which means a living word that is personal and private to you. That means it is not the *total* written word of God; it is individual parts of the word that come alive in your life. Have you ever been reading along in the Bible and a passage you've read many times before suddenly jumps off the page and grabs you by the lapels and says, "Here I am." That is the *logos*, the written word of God becoming the *rhema*, the living

word of God. Have you ever been sitting in a church service and you hear something, and you say, "Man, that's a revelation to me!" That is the *logos* becoming the *rhema*, the true personal word of God.

Faith is hearing and believing when you hear God. There is an incident in the life of Jesus as recorded in Mark 9, where Jesus is getting ready to cast the demon out of a little boy who is tormented. Jesus turns to the father, not to the boy, and says, "Do you believe that I can set your little boy free?" Immediately, the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief." Then Jesus says to him, "I can set your boy free." He heard the word of Jesus, and he said, "Okay, I'm going to believe what you say." He exhibited faith, and a miracle took place. His little boy was set free from his torment.

Our word for "hear the word of God" is the word *acoulo*. We get our word acoustics from it. Do you know what acoustics are...are...are? Somebody once asked me what I thought about the acoustics in our church? I replied, "I think we ought to let anybody come who wants to." Acoustics are how you hear the sound in a building. That's why when we move in our new building, we have hired an acoustician who's been working with us for over two years to make sure the acoustics are good. God is speaking, but our personal acoustics may not be very good. We are not hearing God and believing what we hear when we read the word of God.

2. Faith is receiving what God gives

This came as a revelation to me a number of years ago. I thought, in salvation, God's part was grace, and my part was to come up and generate some faith to trust God. I have since learned I was wrong. You know what my part in salvation is? God does it all, because I don't generate my own faith. God even gives faith as a gift to me. Look at what it says in Ephesians 2:8, probably the clearest verse in the Bible about salvation: "For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."

Saving faith is a gift from God. I used to think, "I'm doing a pretty good job believing." The Bible says if there's any part of salvation you can brag about, it's not salvation. Ephesians 2:9 says, "not of works lest any person could boast." If our faith regenerated and manufactured on its own, one person that could say, "My faith is stronger than your faith." They could brag about it, and it's not of God. Salvation is God giving us the gift of faith, and all we can do is receive it, use it and thank God for it. Look at Romans 10:17 again. It says, "Faith comes." You don't generate it; you don't manufacture it, faith comes.

One of my favorite things is to go into somebody's home and share a meal in them, so many of the Green Acres members are gracious enough to invite me and my wife into their homes. Imagine us eating dinner, sitting around and talking and laughing. When it's time to leave, can you imagine me standing up and saying, "That was a great meal. How much do I owe you? \$10, \$20?" Can you imagine me slapping \$20 on the table and saying, "Good meal," and then walking out? You would be terribly offended; you would be insulted. Why? Because what you were doing was a gracious act of hospitality. The meal was a gift. For me not to accept it as a gift, for me to think it's something I could pay for like in a restaurant would be terribly offensive to you. God says, "I'm going to give you the gift of eternal life. I'm going to give you the gift of

forgiveness and, oh, by the way, I'm even going to give you the gift of faith to receive it." Salvation is all of the Lord. It's kind of like Christmas time when my girls were little, and I used to send them into the mall to buy me a Christmas present. You know what I would do before I sent them into the mall to buy me a Christmas present? I would give them the money to buy me a Christmas present, but I still loved it. That's what God says. He says, "Faith is what I require of you, but I'm going to give you the faith for you to believe in me."

Faith is believing what God says, that's hearing. Faith is receiving what God gives, that's a gift.

3. Faith is trusting who God is

It's not something we do one time. I trusted God 45 years ago when I was saved. It is a continual action on my part of saying, "I trust you, God. I trust you every day in every way." Hebrews 11:6 says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." Faith is the only currency that works in God's economy.

Faith is not your feelings. Many times people will say, "I just don't feel like witnessing, I don't feel like going to church, I don't feel like singing praises." Folks, it's not feelings; it is faith. It is not your friends, it is not your fame, it is not your fortune, it is not fate. It's faith. Faith is the only currency that works in God's economy. That's how we relate to God. You can't relate to God exactly like you relate to me, because you can see me, you can hear me, you can touch me. But you can't see God, you can't touch Him. God is Spirit, and you must relate to Him on that level by faith.

Folks sometimes misunderstand faith. They think faith is what works. Sometimes people will say, "Have faith and everything will turn out okay, friend." That's not always true, because having faith doesn't help you. Faith is no good unless the object of your faith is strong enough to carry out what he says he'll do. A few minutes ago, I was standing on this floor and Jimmy jumped into my arms. He was saying, "I trust you that you're strong enough to hold me." That's what faith is. It's not saying, "I do believe in God; I believe He can save me." Faith is casting ourselves on God, saying, "God, here I am. I'm trusting you with all I have and all I am."

I heard the story of a man who was going to walk across the Mississippi River while it was frozen. He got about halfway out, and suddenly he became afraid that the ice was too thin. He turned back to shore and became so overcome with fear he got down on his hands and knees and started crawling back, hoping the ice wouldn't break under him. He heard a terrible noise and thought it was the sound of the ice breaking up. He thought he was going to fall into the frozen water and drown. The sound kept getting louder. He looked up and saw a man leading a team of mules coming toward him across the river from the other side. The mules were dragging logs across the ice. He looked around, stood up, turned around and walked across the frozen river without fear. Now let me ask you, did his faith change? His faith was in the ice, and before he feared, but suddenly he had faith in the ice. Up north they say, "Great faith in thin ice can kill you, but even a little faith in thick ice will hold you up."

Great faith in the wrong thing won't help you, but even a little bit of faith in God is enough to save you. God is there and God is trustworthy and God can be taken at His word. So trust Him. Somebody said, “Well, isn't faith powerful enough to move mountains?” No, friend. You say, “Wait a minute, didn't Jesus say if we have faith the size of a mustard seed, we can say to a mountain, ‘get up and be cast into the sea?’ Isn't there such a thing called mountain moving faith?” No. Faith can't move mountains. God can. And your faith in God can.

People in the faith healing movement sometimes say, “If you just had enough faith, God would heal you.” Faith has never healed anybody. God sometimes heals people, and it requires our faith, but it's not our faith. It's God that does it. So a little bit of faith in a powerful God is what we need.

In the early 1960s, John F. Kennedy came to Dallas, Texas, and was killed by an assassin's bullet. Most of you remember where you were when you heard he had been shot. I was not living in Texas at that time, but I was surprised in the months and even the years after that, it was almost like people blamed Dallas for JFK's death or they blamed Texas or they blamed the South. I never understood that.

We need to understand that God deals with individuals. Look at Romans 10:13 again. It doesn't say all, plural, who call upon the Lord will be saved. It's singular. *Everyone* who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. God expects each one of us to be responsible for our own behavior, and he also expects each one of us to be personally responsible for our own faith. You're not responsible for anybody else's sin, and you're not responsible for anybody else's salvation. It's your personal response to God in faith, and that's a gift to you.

Imagine a diagram of a circle with the word “Salvation” in the middle. “God's Grace” is on top, with “Hearing God's Word” on one side and “His Gift of Faith” on the other side. “My Faith” is on the bottom of the circle. That's what salvation is, God's grace coming down saying, “Here it is, I'm holding out my hands to you.” On the side, God is saying, “I'm even going to give you the gift of faith.” It comes from God. Once we receive those, we respond to God with faith, and that's when salvation takes place.



CONCLUSION

A number of years ago, I did a sociology report on what happened in Austin on August 1, 1966. Some of you recall there was a man named Charles Whitman who climbed to the top of the tower of the campus of the University of Texas with his own personal arsenal and started shooting indiscriminately down on the square below. He was finally shot, but not before he killed 16 innocent people. I remember reading a remark by a writer for the *New York Times*. I disagreed with him then, and I still disagree. He said, “Charles Whitman was a pathetic victim of the social chaos of the 1960s.” Folks, he wasn’t the victim. Those 16 innocent dead people were the victims. I’ll tell you who is to blame. Charles Whitman is to blame. You cannot be blamed for Charles Whitman’s sin, and he cannot be blamed for your sin. You cannot be blamed for someone else’s sin. You can only be responsible for your own sin, and you can only be responsible for your own salvation. Today God is holding out His hands to you saying, “Here, all day long, I’m offering you salvation.” How will you respond?

OUTLINE

I. GRACE: GOD REACHING OUT TO ME (13-15)

The Process:

1. God sends a preacher to sinners (15)
2. The preacher shares good news (15)
3. The hearer believes (or rejects) the message. (14)
4. The believer calls on Jesus (14)
5. God saves everyone who calls on Jesus (14)

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..." *Hebrews 12:2a*

II. FAITH: MY RESPONSE TO GOD'S OFFER (16-21)

Faith is:

1. Believing what God says

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" *Mark 9:24*

2. Receiving what God gives

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God...
Ephesians 2:8

3. Trusting who God is

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. *Hebrews 11:6*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes