

“Demands and Promises”

Romans 10:5-17

August 13, 2017

Have you ever frantically searched for something that was right by you all the time? Maybe you've had those moments where you couldn't find your glasses and you start frantically searching for them only to discover that they have been on your head the entire time. Or maybe it was your wallet. It's not in your pocket or your purse where you always keep it and as you start searching for it you begin to panic thinking, "Did I lose it? Did someone take it when I set it down? What if I can't find it? My credit cards, my driver's license, and my paycheck are all in there, how am I going to replace those things? But then you find it in your coat pocket, and you remember intentionally putting it there for safe keeping. Such searches that cause us to panic will at best make you feel foolish, and at worst can be very traumatic.

Another kind of frantic search that can not only cause trauma, but end in tragedy is the search for eternal life with God. Many people search high and low for the meaning of life never realizing it's already with them. They spend years reading books, comparing religions, and even traveling the world to find the answers to life when in reality the truth was always with them. Paul says in our second lesson for today from Romans that you don't have to knock yourself out to find life with God. It's already near you; it's in God's Word and it's in your heart.

Last week we read in Romans 9 how Paul agonized over the fact that many of his own people, the Jews, God's chosen people, were not members of God's kingdom. They had fallen away from God, because they refused to believe in Jesus as the Savior of the world. Many of the Jews rejected Jesus, because they were looking for eternal life in the laws and commands that God had given to Moses instead of in the promises that God has given to us in Jesus. They thought that eternal life with God was something that had to be earned through their own efforts, not through the efforts of Jesus and offered to them as a free gift. That just didn't make sense. Nothing in life is free.

It is often said that there are really only two religions in the world, two plans for obtaining eternal life with God. One is to be saved by earning it. The other is to receive it as a gift. There is a huge difference between the law of God and the gospel of Jesus. The law demands that we work for heaven, while the Gospel promises that eternal life with Jesus is a gift He gives to us. Paul puts attempting to keep the law of God perfectly, as it demands, into the category of trying to earn eternal life. In verse 5 Paul said, "For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them." Attempting to earn righteousness, that is eternal life, by the law is a totally unworkable option. No matter how hard we try, none of us are able to keep God's commands perfectly. And the Bible says that the punishment for breaking God's laws or commands is death – eternal separation from God.

But the alternative Paul presents in verse 6 is "the righteousness based on faith," meaning that God's plan for eternal life with Him is not based on us doing and earning, but on receiving and believing that Jesus died on a cross for our sins, and God raised Him from the dead as our Savior and substitute. That's more than just saying that Jesus is a good guy and a good teacher. It's saying that Jesus is God and sadly there are many people in our world who think it is foolish to believe that Jesus is God, but it's really the other way around. It's foolish not to believe that Jesus is God. After all, hundreds of people witnessed His resurrection, and most of them were skeptical about Jesus as the Messiah before He died. But when He rose from the dead and they saw Him alive, it changed everything and they told everyone this amazing news.

But just to know what the Bible says about Jesus does not lead to eternal life. Paul said in this text that we are saved by believing and confessing the truth about Jesus. Verse 10 says, "For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." Eternal life is near us, because it's not only in the Word of God, but it's in our words of faith. However, faith is not the cause of eternal life with God. Jesus' perfect life, death, and resurrection is what has created eternal life for us. Faith is simply the vehicle that brings eternal life to us, it is what makes Jesus' gift of forgiveness our own.

Think of it this way. Imagine going into a car dealership's showroom and you discover there are only two cars on display, and these are the only cars he has available. The first car is a large, black, 4-wheel drive, fully loaded Hummer. This is the one the experts have been raving about and everyone wants to own. It's big, it's powerful, and you can take it anywhere. Next to this powerful machine is the only other car on the lot – an old,

beat up, compact car with a sign on the windshield that reads, “Nothing Down, No Interest, No Monthly Payments.” When you see this car, you immediately think of words like “Pacer,” “Yugo,” or “Pinto.” You’d rather die than be caught behind the wheel of this old beat-up car. You quickly look back at the Hummer and you imagine yourself driving this thing for everyone to see. But then you look at the sticker price on the Hummer and you’re stunned. You can’t afford a Hummer, no matter how badly you want it. You know if you bought it that you would be making monthly payments on it for the rest of your life, while still coming up short every month.

Well, the law of God is like this Hummer. The Law is powerful, it is perfect, and it is pricey in every way. You want to follow it, you want to follow God’s commandments, but are you willing to give up every unkind word and thought forever? Are you willing to never covet anything ever again in your life? Are you willing to put God first in everything you do or say, every day, and never deviate from that position? If you can do that, then you will live. The Law of God is backed by a lifetime warranty. “Do this,” Jesus says in the Gospel of Luke, “and you will live forever.” It seems like the logical way to go. If you want something, you have to pay for it. But failure to do this, even once, will result in penalties, interest, and more payments forever. The Law is definitely not the way to go, because no one is perfect. There is no grace period or forgiveness with the Law, and no one can earn eternal life by trying to keep the Law.

That other vehicle on the showroom floor is like the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It has always been despised and rejected, but it never seems to stop and it is the only thing that can get us where we want to go and that is heaven. Faith in Jesus is the only reliable form of transportation as it requires nothing down. No gold or silver are required, only the precious blood of Jesus, and this faith comes free by hearing the Word of God. Faith charges no interest. Jesus did all the borrowing, including a donkey He rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, a cross on which to die, and a grave in which to lie for us so we could live. Faith does not require any monthly payments. Jesus paid it all, principle and interest, to declare us free by His grace through faith in Him. As a result, we tell the world about Christ, so that all may be saved, but not as a required repayment for what He has done for us, but simply because saving faith is never silent. It is personal, but it is never private.

Everything the Law of God demanded but couldn’t fulfill because of our sinful nature, Jesus provided by His grace through faith in Him – namely an eternal relationship with Him fully loaded, with a life-everlasting warranty. It may seem unlikely, this battered old car being given away for free, but Jesus, beaten and battered on a cross, and faith, which enables His life-saving forgiveness to become ours, is definitely the way to go.

While those two cars looked very different, the one thing they have in common is they both need fuel in order to operate or they will die. God’s Word is our fuel and if we are not connected and filled with God’s Word on a regular basis, then we will die, because everything else in this world leads to death. God’s Word is available for everyone and it is in your heart. Share it, so that everyone will know that Jesus is God and real life is found only through faith in Him.