

The Voice of Jesus

By Pastor Jeff Alexander

INTRODUCTION

"For 'everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!' . . . So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Romans 10:13-15, 17).

In Romans 10:13 God makes a promise that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved—saved from his sins. (The whole human race is in danger of the wrath of God that threatens punishment for those sins.)

In making this promise, several rhetorical questions are posed, outlining the conditions that make it possible for one to call on the name of the Lord. The first condition is that one cannot call on someone in whom they have no trust or confidence ("*believed*"). *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed?*

The second condition is that one can have no confidence in a person unless that person has given him reason for his confidence. *"How are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?"*

The text here requires a bit of explanation. The English Standard Version (ESV) has *"how are they to believe in him **of whom** they have never heard?"* Many interpreters, however, argue that *"of"* should be dropped in order to read, *"How are they to believe in him **whom** they have not heard?"* Simply hearing *about* Christ does not give one faith to trust Him; one must actually *hear Christ Himself*, not by an audible voice, but through the Word of God. As Christ Himself speaks to the sinner, the sinner responds in faith and trust. It is for this interpretation that this article contends, seeking to demonstrate its truth from Scripture.

The third rhetorical question concerns how the sinner hears Christ in order to believe in Him. *"How are they to hear without someone preaching?"* The fourth concerns the qualification of the messenger. *"How are they to preach unless they are sent?"* That is, no one will hear Christ without a qualified preacher (*literally* "a herald") of God's Word—one who is duly called and commissioned by God. Not all pastors and ministers have authority from God to preach and so are not used of God to call His people to salvation.

Paul's main point in this section of Romans is that calling on the name of the Lord requires ones believing in Christ. To believe in Christ, he must hear His voice through the gospel proclaimed by a divinely commissioned messenger of God's Word (vs. 17). We assert that Christ Himself *calls* His own to salvation through the preacher as he proclaims His Word (*cf.* Ephesians 2:17).

My Sheep

The Bible is clear that there is a body of people whom God has given to Christ to save (John 17:6, 9, 11, 24; Hebrews 2:13). These people were *"chosen in him before the foundation of the world"* (Ephesians 1:4; Mark 3:20; John 13:18; 15:16, 19; Romans 16:13; 1 Corinthians 1:28; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 17:14). They are called the *elect* of God (Romans 8:33; Colossians 3:12; 2 Timothy 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1 Peter 1:2; 2:6). They are Christ's *sheep* (John 10:3-5, 8, 14-16, 26-29).

Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd of His flock (Luke 12:32; Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2)—His sheep (Luke 15:6; John 21:16-17). It is for His sheep that He laid down His life (John 10:11), and it is to them that He gives eternal life (John 10:28).

According to John 10, the two marks that identify Christ's sheep are (1) that they *know His voice* (10:4, 14), and (2) that they *follow Him* (10:4, 27).

When the Jews asked Jesus concerning His identity (10:24), He explained that He had already told them but they did not believe Him (10:25). Then Jesus explained to them the reasons for their not believing on Him: (1) because they were not His sheep (10:26), and (2) because they did not *hear* His voice (implied in verse 27). His sheep do *hear* his voice.

This is exactly what Paul said in Romans 10:13-14. One must call on the name of the Lord in order to be saved. However, to call on Him requires that one must first believe in Him, and that to believe in Him, one must also hear His voice.

The Voice of the Son of God

Our Lord's own words in John 5 confirm the truth that we are asserting. In the context of this chapter, the Jews sought to kill Jesus because He had declared His equality with God (5:18). Here, Jesus explained that He had come to work the Father's work (5:19-20). It was the Father's work to raise the dead, so it was also the work of the Son to raise the dead (to *"give life"* to whom He would, 5:21). (Please note that Christ gives life to whom *He will*. He does not wait for the dead to *will* to be raised, as if the dead could will to be raised).

Next, Christ announced this startling truth: *"The hour is coming and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live* (5:25; see also Ephesians 2:2). He was referring here to quickening the *spiritually* dead, not the physically dead, as some suppose. This fact is proven by the following where Christ says, *"Do not marvel at this* [that He can raise the spiritually dead, v. 25]."*"* Christ also has authority from the Father to raise the physically dead. *"An hour is coming"*, He continues, *"When all that are in the tombs* [the physically dead], *will hear his voice and come out"* (vv. 28, 29).

It is the *voice of the Son of God* that quickens the dead, both spiritually and physically. Therefore, no one will call upon Christ for salvation who has not heard His voice and come out of his spiritual grave. The raising of Lazarus in John 11 illustrates this point.

"Lazarus, Come Forth!"

Jesus' friend Lazarus died and was buried. When the Lord came to Lazarus' sisters after the funeral, He was met with a rebuke. If He had been there, the sisters were confident, Lazarus would still be alive. Jesus could have healed him of his illness (11:21, 32). Jesus assured Martha, *"Your brother will rise again"* (11:23). However, Martha was thinking only of some future resurrection day when all the dead would be raised. Jesus responded that *He* was the resurrection, not some future *day* (11:25, 26).

The hardness and unbelief that were evident all around Him caused our Lord to groan in His spirit (11:33, 38). He asked to be taken to the grave. There He commanded that the stone be taken away. After some initial protest, the request was honored, and Jesus stood in the opening of the cave. With a loud voice Jesus called the dead Lazarus to life, and *"the man who had died came out"* (11:44).

Lazarus lived because he heard the voice of the Son of God. He did not live because *he* willed to live but because *the Son willed* that he should live. Also, we may be quite sure that when Lazarus heard Christ's voice, he willingly obeyed His command to come forth! No dead one can will to be raised, but once raised, he can then certainly will to come to Jesus.

This is not a popular truth. What is frequently taught in evangelical churches today is that God cannot force anyone to be saved. Only as the sinner is willing to come to Jesus is

Jesus able to save him. However, we must weigh this concept with what is clearly taught in the Word of God.

Conclusion

Paul declared in Romans 10:13 that whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. The question is this, who will call upon the name of the Lord? To answer this question, Paul asks four rhetorical questions: (1) How shall they call on the Lord if they do not believe in the Lord? (2) How shall they believe in the Lord if they have not heard the Lord? (3) How shall they hear the Lord if they do not have a gospel proclamation? (4) How shall they have a preacher if God does not commission and send him?

Paul summarizes this evangelical truth in the seventeenth verse: "*So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*" The term "word" in this verse is the Greek word *rhema*, not *logos*. *Rhema* emphasizes what is spoken. Faith comes when Christ speaks and is heard. Now, have you *heard* His voice? Has He called you out as one of His sheep? Are you following Him?

Many claim to know and serve Christ, but they do not follow Him. They want to be their own shepherd. They graze in the pastures of sin and worldly pleasure. They respond to the voice of strangers (John 10:5) and follow them. However, the Lord's sheep do not do these things nor will they ever hear Him say to them, "*I never knew you: depart from me, you who work iniquity*" (Matt. 7:23).

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