

Romans 10:8b-13 NIV

“Do you confess the good things?”

“But what does it say? ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart’ that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That 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. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’

“For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”

Thesis: Knowing that only his mercy can save us, we must confess that Jesus is Lord and savior.

Ever walk into a room and find two persons seriously talking?

They’re in the middle of a conversation.

You didn’t hear how it started.

You don’t know what either person said before you came.

We easily misjudge conversations like that, don’t we?

That’s what we face in this Romans text.

It’s a lengthy two sided conversation.

The Lectionary reading starts in the middle of it.

That’s why people often misjudge what it says.

Take it the wrong way.

The result is misunderstood Scripture.

Good, sincere people making wrong assumptions.

This text relates to something on everybody’s mind.

Something we do.

Though it’s often on our minds, few people ponder why we think about.

We try to justify our actions. That feeling separates us from animals.

We do something wrong.

Something questionable.

We often try to justify what we did, right?

We try to excuse what we’ve done.

Let’s say our late dog Doke did something he shouldn’t.

Something he got in trouble for doing—like trying to bite the tires off the mailman’s car.

Or tear paper into shreds.

He knew he’d done wrong.

He’d run up onto the deck with a “curious” look on his face.

But Doke never tried to defend his actions.

I’m different.

I’m always trying to justify my behavior.



Come up with excuses for what I do.

In the early days of trains, most people except for Native Americans thought railroads were great.

Folks respected and admired inventors who worked with steam and the engineers who drove the trains.

Like today’s NASA scientists and astrophysicists, they held status.

Respect for railroads waned, however. “Farmers in the Plains states thought freight rates were too high, and that railroads charged too much money for land the federal government had given them.”¹

Some became so bitter toward railroads, to them, train robbery wasn’t a crime.

Near Adair, Iowa in 1873, Frank and Jesse James robbed their first train.

They removed some rails from the track; a Rock Island passenger train came at full steam.

Seeing the torn up track, the engineer threw the engine into reverse.

The engine derailed, tilted over, and crushed the engineer.

The James boys boarded the train.

They took \$4,000 from the express car



safe and a lot of jewelry and cash from the passengers.

The James boys claimed they were justified taking from the railroads.

“When they robbed trains, railroads got what they deserved.”

Many folks agreed with the James boys.

Some considered guys like Frank and Jesse James heroes.

“It’s justice!” they said.

Many today hold the same view of banks, insurance companies, and big businesses.

If they get something from one of those firms by shady means, it’s okay.

Why?

Because, in their view, rich, greedy businessmen control big corporations.

We have this need to justify our actions, don’t we?

Even when we know what we do is wrong.

The Book of Romans deals with justification.

What makes a person righteous?

Especially, righteous enough to go to heaven?

Our text speaks of the journey’s end, so to speak.

We spend a lifetime on earth.

In the end, will we be judged as good or bad?

¹ *Railroads in the Days of Steam*, p.81

After decades of making deals, working, rearing a family, sharing with neighbors, and worshiping God, what will be on “the bottom line” of your life?

These questions relate to righteousness and justification?

How do you get righteousness or become righteous?

These are not idle questions.

We need answers to them.

Why?

If being righteous isn't important, why do we spend so much time trying to justify our action?

The James boys and their contemporaries tried to justify their deeds.

The question seems built into our minds.

Albert Einstein questioned how he'd spent his life.

That conversation dominates the *Book of Romans*.

It resembles the question on IRS schedule 1040 that we file yearly.

How much did you net last year?

The concern in *Romans* isn't net dollars.

Romans deals with net righteousness.

We've noted before that Christians try to find net righteousness two ways:

One: many keep laws like the Ten Commandments.

Romans tells us this about keeping any type of law:

- “Righteousness by law says the person who does these things will live by them.”

At the end of your life, do you want to have net righteousness on the bottom line?

“Just keep the Ten Commandments,” say many.

Those Ten Commands sound easy.

They are simple; easily understood.

Some brag about how well they keep them.

Keeping the Ten Commandments, however, isn't as easy as some think.

People who claim their righteousness forget an important truth.

Boasting about our godliness or righteousness equals trying to be gods to other people.

If we think others should honor us because we're wise, smart, or righteous, we make ourselves into tin-horn gods.



We violate the first commandment:

“Don't have any other gods before me.”

If you'll pardon my “English,” many of us are guilty as “hell” of violating this, aren't we?

If we can't pass the first test, we're not ready for questions two through ten.

Recall what Jesus told his contemporaries?

“Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees,” you won't be strutting up the steps to any mansion.

The scribes and Pharisees spoke so proudly of

keeping the “back nine” they forgot the first one.

Jesus spoke to our righteousness issue:

“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:

‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.”’

Sounds like he mastered two through ten, doesn't it?

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” This man went down to his home justified,” said Jesus.²

Pride terribly afflicts us humans, doesn't it?

Human pride makes us nothing but puny, air-filled gods.

No one can be justified by keeping law.

Most of us can't get past law number one.

Neither do we fully keep the other laws as some claim.

All fail at law-keeping.

That's the first part of the conversation in Romans.

- Righteousness by law says the man who does these

things will live by them.

If we can't keep the law, we can't live.

We clearly we can't keep the Law, so we're DOA.

- Consider another vital point about the bottom line of righteousness:

When pollsters ask Americans whether they expect to go to heaven, about 75% think that they'll get there.

Pretty high numbers, aren't they?

Jesus didn't predict percentages like that.

You remember what he said:

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it"³

Few find life, Jesus said.

“Few” doesn't sound like 75%, does it?

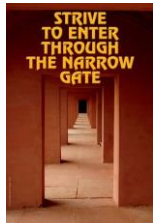
Are many of us are too optimistic?

We often make the mistake the scribes and Pharisees did.

We live in the age when people respect the scientific method and logic.

Let's apply them to the idea that your righteous life sufficiently earns you a “mansion over the hilltop.”

A typical life these days is 75-100 years.



² Luke 18:9-13 NIV

³ Matthew 7:13, 14 NIV The English word oligarchy—meaning “rule by a few” comes from the word Matthew used for few.

No one gets past 120.

That’s the upper limit, isn’t it?

For all of us, one day will become our final one.

We won’t see sun-up the next day.

We’ll never talk again.

Never play cards or bingo, watch another ball game or see another movie.

Friends won’t see us on the street or driving by.

No one will see us at the bank or the PO or the pool hall or church building.

If you knew that day were coming soon, how much would you pay to obtain another 20 or 30 years of life?

I’ve mentioned how for a short time, I worked for an extremely wealthy Oklahoma couple.

I heard that at one time they were the wealthiest couple west of the Mississippi River.

The husband told me that his first wife developed cancer in the early 1930s.

He took his wife all over the world trying to find a cure.



Money didn’t limit their search.

He spent \$250,000—a fortune in that time.

With all of his wealth, he couldn’t buy one additional day of life for his beloved wife.

How much is life worth?

Once life ends, the wealthy stand no more chance of coming back from the dead than the destitute.

How much is life worth?

A young couple we knew got married shortly before Norma and I began working for the Hollywood Church.

Not long after we started, the wife visited her family out of state.

She and several members of her family died in a car accident there.

Her young grieving husband told how he traveled to her hometown hoping to find some spark or sign of life left in her body.

When he got there, he realized his mission was hopeless.

He would never see or talk to his beautiful, innocent beloved bride again.

How much could you pay or how much effort could you expend to restore life to someone who has died?

How much righteousness would it take to pay for your life or for your loved one’s?

One more point about our ability to earn eternal life.

Look at eternal life from a business point of view.

Insurance people speak of actuarial tables, wherein they compute risks and premiums.

Many consider eternity an entitlement because they lived and did a few good things.

So we live ninety years, plus or minus a few.

If you live a good life for 90 years, to how many years of credit do you figure you are entitled?

**Do you calculate you've earned at least another 90?
How far will 90 years extend into eternity?**

The creation is said to be about 5-6 billion years old.

How far would 90 take you into 5 billion?

If my math is correct, 90 is the following percent of 5 billion: .0000018%.⁴

That's the only percentage I've seen lately that is less than the amount you can earn on a CD.

We can't buy one additional day in this life.

On what basis, can any human being think that he/she earns a right to everlasting life?

We obtain eternity only if an all-powerful, immortal, merciful, generous being gives it to us.

Only the Son of God can make it happen for anyone.

He controls eternity for all of us.

“He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”⁵

Jesus came back from death, never to die again.

- **God's children gladly listen to Him and learn.**
 - **They humble themselves before Him.**
 - **By being baptized into Him, they join Christ in His death and resurrection.**
 - **God's children continue confessing Jesus wherever they go and they live to honor Him.**
- “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.”**

Do you believe that with all of your heart?

Will you confess that before your friends and those who scoff at Him?

“For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.’”

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Thank You, LORD!

To read other sermons by Bob for no charge and no obligation:

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⁴ Thanks to sons-in-law, Lloyd & Sean, and our friend Kathy, a high school math teacher, who helped me figure this. I erred in my computations by a few zeroes.

⁵ John 1:10-12 NIV