

So Close, Yet So Far Away
Romans 9:30-10:21
#38th in a Series on Paul's Letter to the Romans
Faith Community Church – July 30, 2006

Objective: *To explore the reason for Israel's failure to believe the Gospel in this passage, and to urge people to be sure that they believe (responsibility) and that they have rejected their own righteousness as providing any merit before God.*

Introduction

Please open your Bibles to Romans 9:30.

Among the great movies about the second world war is the film, *The Great Escape*, starring Steve McQueen. It is based on an actual event, where scores of Allied prisoners worked tirelessly to break out of a German POW camp in Poland. It is estimated that in the process of digging three escape tunnels – codenamed Tom, Dick and Harry – the prisoners moved over 100 tons of dirt by filling socks and hanging them inside of their pants, letting the dirt scatter over the prison compound.

When “Tom” of the three tunnels was discovered, the prisoners focused all of their efforts on “Harry.” The escape was set for the night of March 24, 1944. The tunnel had been constructed to reach the cover of the woods that surrounded the camp. But when the surface was broken, it was discovered that they were ten feet short. Only 76 of the planned 200 men got out before they were detected by a German guard. Within a few days, 73 of the 76 escapees were recaptured. Only three made it back to Allied lines.

Can you imagine the feeling of being so close, yet so far away?

If you are a sports fan you can relate to that feeling. What Phillies fan can forget the night in October of 1993 when the Phillies had their World Series championship hopes dashed by one swing of Joe Carter's bat. I'm sure that there are some Eagles' fans who are still trying to break free from the depression of finally making it the Super Bowl in January 2005, only to lose 24-21 to the New England Patriots. So close, yet so far away.

The passage we'll look at this morning talks about being so close, but being so far away as Paul continues to deal with a question about Israel. Let's look at the passage to see what Paul is saying, and discover how his words relate to us.

Understanding this Section of Romans

As we saw last week, Paul has reached a point in this letter where he feels the need to address an issue that was important to many people of his day, especially those who had converted to Christ from Judaism. Initially the church was primarily Jewish in nature, but as time has gone on, that is no longer true. The Church was primarily made up of Gentiles, with a smaller percentage of Jewish converts. This resulted in a question

among Jewish Christians about God's promises in the Old Testament. Had God's promises they failed?

In Romans 9-11, Paul answers that question. Let me give us a brief outline of what he says with regard to this question about Israel:

- Romans 9 – What has happened?
 - a. Understand who “Israel” really is – those who God has chosen and who believe.
 - b. The response both of Israel and the Gentiles was foretold in the OT.
- Romans 10 – Why is has happened?
- Romans 11 – What is going to happen in the future?

So Close to the Truth and Yet So Far Away

1. The Reason for Israel's Condition (9:30-10:4)
 - a. The enigma reviewed. (9:30-31)
 - b. He answers the reason for these events in 9:32-10:4.
 - i. They stumbled over Christ.
 1. Paul quotes from Isaiah 28:16 in 9:33 - stumbling
 2. See Matthew 21:33-44 – Jesus' parable of the tenants and the application.
 3. Peter later parallels what Paul writes in 1 Peter 2:4-8
 - ii. They tried to establish their own righteousness. (9:32; 10:1-4). Israel has not been saved for the same reason a lot of people are not saved: there is a universal appeal to self-justification. Somehow people find things that they feel bring them merit. Positions they occupy, good deeds they have done, religious activities they perform – all of this is a way of self-justification. And Christ becomes wholly unnecessary. But in the end it is nothing more than a of submission to God.
2. The Accessibility of the Truth. (10:5-13)
 - a. An illustration from the Old Testament. Read verses 5-8 again.
 - i. Verse 5 comes from Leviticus 18:1-5 (vs. 5). Is Moses saying that a person who fulfills the Law would find eternal life? Yes, but we need to see the rest of the picture. Trace this chain:
 1. Deuteronomy 27:26 – “cursed is anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.”
 2. So what's the point? See Galatians 3:19-24.
 3. So theoretically a person could keep the law and inherit eternal life. But no one does, and Paul has shown us already that when exposed to the Law, our nature is to rebel against what God has told us to do. (Rom. 7:7-12)
 4. We see this illustrated perfectly in Luke 10:25-28. Note vs. 29.

- ii. To pursue righteousness through the Law, then, is a dead-end street. But the answer isn't hard to find. Verses 6-8 are taken from Deuteronomy 30:11-13, and applied to Christ.
 - 1. In Deuteronomy, Moses was making the point, after rehearsing the blessings and cursings of the Law, that God's will was not hidden, but right in front of them.
 - 2. Paul restates the passage in reference to Christ, saying that the Gospel is right in front of people.
 - b. In light of the message of the Gospel, what is God's consistent requirement? The answer is to believe. (10:9-13)
 - i. The great statements of verses 9-10 are intended to underscore the idea of righteousness through faith alone that Paul has promoted all through Romans so far.
 - ii. Not only that, but the promise of salvation by faith is universal – given to both Jew and Gentile.
3. The Rejection of an Excuse (10:14-21)
- a. Verses 14-15 are verses that we often hear used as an incentive to share Christ, and they do present God's means for getting the Gospel to people. But that is not on Paul's mind here. Paul, as we have seen, writes in a debating style that was common to his day, and often anticipates and answers objections. And that is what is happening in verses 14-15. It is as if Paul anticipates Israel saying, "When did we ever hear the Gospel?"
 - b. We need to ask when they heard? How could Israel know that the Law would not save?
 - i. Abraham's example – Genesis 15:1-6
 - ii. God's own warning – Deuteronomy 31:14-29
 - iii. The sacrificial system taught them of the need for atonement.
 - iv. The messianic prophecies – Isaiah 53 – why a Messiah who dies if life comes through the Law?
 - c. So Paul concludes this section by stating that Israel has both heard and has rejected, and that their rejection has resulted in the gathering in of the Gentiles.

Relating This Passage to Our Lives

Most of us haven't sat here this morning and puzzled over why there aren't more Jewish people in our fellowship. So in that sense this problem that Paul discusses doesn't seem to affect us. However, there are two areas in which this passage does speak to us in our situation today:

- 1. It warns against the foolishness of trying to establish our own righteousness. And let's not limit that to people who have not come to trust in Christ. It is easy for us to slip into thinking that we gain some kind of favor with God based on what we do. I had an email from a relatively new Christian a few weeks back in which she said in reference to our review of Romans 1-8 the other week, "*I really had a renewed sense of awe at how much God loves us. I was re awestruck at the fact*

that even though I continue to sin, no matter how hard I try not to, but I know I will always stumble, that when we come face to face with the Lord that He is putting what Jesus did on the cross in front of all that.” That is the perspective that keeps us from trying to establish our own righteousness in our relationship with God. Not that we don't work hard to live in a way that pleases God, but not to somehow earn points.

2. Second, this passage is a warning to those who are so close to the Gospel, yet have not believed. How long have you been hearing God's offer of forgiveness, and how long will you wait to believe? Israel's failure to embrace righteousness by faith proved to be perilous. Don't let that be true of you.