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## **In the Race, but Not Finishing**

Romans 9:30-10:21

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### **Introduction:**

On April 21, 1980 Rosie Ruiz, a 23-year-old New Yorker, was the first woman to cross the finish line in the Boston Marathon. She had achieved the third fastest time ever recorded for a female runner (two hours, thirty-one minutes, and fifty-six seconds), which was made all the more remarkable by the fact that she looked remarkably sweat-free and relaxed as she climbed the winner's podium to accept her wreath. However, race officials almost immediately began to question her victory.

The problem was that no one could remember having seen her during the race. Monitors at the various race checkpoints hadn't seen her, nor had any of the other runners. Numerous photographs taken during the race failed to contain any sign of her. Her absence was overwhelming. Finally, a few members of the crowd came forward to reveal that they had seen her jump into the race during its final half-mile. Apparently she had then simply sprinted to the finish line.

The Apostle Paul describes something similar here in Romans 9:30-33 that introduces his second argument to his perplexing question: Has the word of God failed the Jews? Is Jesus still going to bring salvation to the Jews? Most Jews in Paul's day, as in ours, did not believe in the Messiah. Had God failed (9:6)?

As we noticed last week, God had not failed in bringing about His promise because first of all, God had never promised salvation to every Jew (9:6b). Salvation to the Jew was not based on physical descent or by works but by the sovereign election of God and nothing else. Then, the Apostle Paul says that those who were not even in the race have finished (Gentiles) and those who started the race (Jews) are running in a different direction from the finish line. So, his second argument is that God's promise to the Jews has not failed because the Jews failure to respond to God's word is their own fault for pursuing a *wrong goal* by *wrong methods*. In other words, the Jews themselves are responsible for their unbelief.

Pay special attention to these two chapters. In chapter 9, the unbelief of Jews is specifically credited to God's sovereign election. He simply never intended to save every Jew, only a remnant (cf.9:27). But, in chapter 10, the Jews unbelief is credited to their own failure to respond to God's word. Unconditional divine election and human responsibility stand side-by-side, and neither should be allowed to cancel or mitigate the other.

### **A Contrast (9:30-10:13)**

In our section of Scripture for today, Paul develops a contrast between the Gentiles and the Jews. The ones who finished the race, namely, the Gentiles, did so by way of faith.

While on the other hand, the Jews, who started the race, never finished. The contrast is between the righteousness of God and one's own righteousness (10:3).

- The righteousness of God comes by faith (9:30; 10:4, 6, 10).
- One's own righteousness comes by commandment-keeping (works of the law) (9:31-32; 10:5).

***The contrast is between doing and believing!***

Paul develops this contrast in three parallel paragraphs (9:30-33; 10:1-4; 5-13). In each of these paragraphs he accuses the Jews as a whole of missing God's righteousness in Christ, the only righteousness which can save, because of their preoccupation with works and the law of Moses. After all, a proper understanding of the law would have led them to Christ because Christ is the end, the pinnacle, the climax of the law (10:4).

**Israel Was Pursuing the Wrong Goal (9:30-33).**

"*What shall we say then?*" introduces the new stage in his argument which flows from something he had previously said. What he had previously said in vv. 24-29 is that only a '*remnant*' of Jews were God's people while a group that was '*once far from God*' are now being called the '*sons of God*', meaning the Gentiles. The reason is here spelled out in the rest of the paragraph.

Paul uses the language of the racecourse. "Those who were not even in the race have nevertheless reached the 'finishing line': they have obtained a right standing before God. And they obtained it, as Paul makes clear, by faith. On the other hand, those who started the race are now not even pursuing the original goal but a different one: A law of righteousness (a law which gives righteousness). They have not yet reached their goal, nor can they because the law can not give righteousness as Paul has also made clear (3:20; 4:13-15).

Israel is to be faulted for both pursuing the wrong goal and pursuing in the wrong manner - not by faith but by works. So narrowly were their eyes fixed on the law that, rather than embracing Jesus Christ, the true goal of the race, they stumbled over Him (Is. 8:13-15).

**Israel Was Pursuing the Wrong Means (10:1-4).**

Paul reasserted his heavy burden for his brethren then added to their fault. Had their knowledge matched their zeal, they would have recognized the real finishing line. To keep with the racecourse language let's put it this way: Israel was running strenuously but after the wrong goal. It's as if they received a faulty map and they made a bad turn. Their knowledge sold them short of the true end.

The true finishing line is the righteous of God (v.3) - the theme of this letter is the Gospel of God's righteousness (cf. 1:16-17). So, while pursuing their own righteousness which comes by works (9:32) and the law (10:5), they refused to accept God's way of making

people right before Himself. They failed to recognize that Christ is the culmination of the law (Matthew 5:17). Since Christ has come, righteousness is freely offered to all who believe - Jew and Gentile alike (10:12-13). Christ is the end of the Law (10:4).

### **Israel Was Pursuing in the Wrong Manner (10:5-13).**

As I have already stated, the main contrast between these two types of righteousness: One's own righteousness and the righteousness of God is a matter of 'doing' versus 'believing'.

It is impossible to obtain righteousness through keeping the law. Why? Because the law has ended! The goal has been reached! The Law is done and no more. When Paul says that Christ is the end of the law, he means that Christ is its point of termination – its culmination. The rails of the law were headed toward “Destination Jesus.” Once it arrived at that point in time, the rails ended. Christ is literally, the end of the run.

Notice what Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on law-keeping: “The person who does the commandment shall live by them.” The emphasis here is on the word “does.” Paul continues in v.6 with the word, “but.” “But the righteousness based on faith says...” So you see, there is a bit of a warning here. There is a righteousness based on doing and there is a righteousness based on believing. The contrast is really between doing and believing. It is between Mosaic Law and Work of Christ. It is between being established in the righteousness that comes from God or being established in your own righteousness.

- Goal: Righteousness of God v. one’s own righteousness
- Mean: Christ v. the Law
- Manner or Method: Trusting v. doing.

This means that where we once put the command, we now put Christ. Look at How Paul quotes and handles Deut. 30:11-14.

Deuteronomy 30:11-14 (ESV)

<sup>11</sup> “For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you [doable], neither is it far off [near]. <sup>12</sup> It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ <sup>13</sup> Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ <sup>14</sup> But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.

The point of Moses’ writing is that the Law, the commands, is present and doable. But each time Moses refers to the commandment being easy and near, Paul substitutes Christ. Look at verse 6:

"But the righteousness based on faith says, 'Do not say in your heart, "Who will ascend into heaven [OT: to bring the commandment near and make it easy and doable]?"' [But Paul says] (that is, to bring Christ down)."

He puts Christ where the commandment is. Then in verse 7 Paul goes on. Neither does the righteousness from faith say

"'Who will descend into the abyss [OT: to bring the commandment near and make it easy and doable]?' [But Paul says] (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)."

Again he puts Christ where the commandment is.

Notice carefully, Paul refers to Christ's **incarnation** – "to bring him down" (v. 6) – and to his **resurrection** – "to bring Christ up from the dead" (v. 7). The point is: There is nothing Israel did to make this happen. Paul puts the earthly life of Christ and the risen life of Christ in the place of our obedience to the commandments. **The GOSPEL is the key to justification.** That's the point of Romans 10:4, which these verses support: "Christ is the goal of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

The only way for being made right before God is not about doing anything. It is about trusting in Christ – the Word of the Gospel.

With the coming of Christ and His resurrection from the dead, the Gospel message is complete and the law has reached its culmination - Christ is the pinnacle and that what we preach - the only way to obtain a right standing before God is to believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ (vv. 9-10).

### **Confess with your Mouth and Believe in Your Heart (9-13)**

If you want to be deemed right with God, the gospel is really quite clear: you must cease striving to establish your own righteousness. You must repent of even your good works. You must rest fully in the finished work of Christ on your behalf. And you must pursue a life filled with faith. The only response to the gospel of God in Christ is faith.

You **MUST** have FAITH (vv.8-13)

The word of faith (that is, the gospel we proclaim) is near you – it is in your mouth and in your heart. Paul is simply connecting faith with the Deut. Passage. The gospel is in your mouth and heart. That is, it is present and it is done when you believe. When a person responds in simple faith the gospel message, it mediates God's salvation.

### **Application:**

Don't make any part of the Christian life about doing – but about believing. The essence of the Christian life is NOT about commandment-keeping or commandment-breaking.

One sign that we are about commandment-keeping instead of faith is that we begin to feel as though God's love for us ebbs and flows according to our actions. When our actions

are at the top of our game, we fell close to God and loved by him, but as soon as our days get crammed with stress and our actions wane, we feel we have to avoid God. We imagine that God is waiting for us to get ourselves back together before we can enter his presence.

I love what John Owen said, “I mourn in secret under the power of my lusts and sin, where no eyes see me; but the Father sees me, and is full of compassion.” We need not run from the Father, but rather to his open arms of love, for by his Son and Spirit he can renew and strengthen us. He stands not over us in judgmental silence, but He sends his Word and Wisdom, that we might know the power of degree of his redeeming love. Run from him? That is the last thing he desires. Run to him – this is to understand the glory of the gospel: “Assure thyself, then, there is nothing more acceptable unto the Father, than for us to keep up our hearts unto him as the eternal fountain of all that rich grace which flows out to sinners in the blood of Jesus.”

I think I need to ask of myself when I feel as though I need to avoid God or to get myself back together before I enter his presence: Was Jesus blood sufficient to forgive that sin? I believe it! Lord, help my unbelief.

All I need is faith. I need to trust that Christ’s sacrifice for sin was enough to provide for me the means of being made right before my Holy God.

John Calvin wrote in his Institutes, “Faith is a firm and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”

Do you have that firm and certain knowledge that God loves you?

Look again at how 10:6 started: “Do not say in your heart.” This was a phrase, a catchphrase, if you will, for all Israel. It comes in a number of places, but the first occurrence is in Duet. 9:4 where God says this to Israel when they finally enter the promised land, “Do not say in your heart...It is because of my righteousness that the Lord has brought me in to possess this land.”

Church, the essence of the Christian life is not about doing. It is about believing. Do you have faith in Christ? Do you rest in his finished work? Do you delight in him above all things? Do you respond in love and faithfulness, communing with him as your most intimate friend? That is the essence of true faith and the Christian life.

The essence of our evil is not that we sin – but that we do not prefer Christ above anything else. We do not have faith. Listen to what John Piper wrote this week:

It is important that we know the nature of the evil in our hearts.

Do you think the essence of your evil is disobeying commandments? That's a good start. But it's not the essence of our evil. Commands simply name the evil and its fruits, and tell us not to do them.

The essence of our evil is that we prefer anything to God (Romans 1:23; 2:23). Commands do not create the possibility of evil. Commands name it.

Long before we are told not to covet, we covet. Disobeying the command, "Thou shalt not covet," is not equivalent to the evil of coveting. The evil of coveting is there first, and then is compounded by the transgression of the commandment not to covet.

Paul said, "I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'" (Romans 7:7). That is, I wouldn't have known the seriousness of my evil if God had not named it in the law.

But lawbreaking is not the essence of my evil. Desiring anything above God is the essence of my evil, before any commands name it.

One reason this is important to know is that it will affect the way you pursue change. If you think the essence of your evil is commandment-breaking, your focus for change will be commandment-keeping.

That is doomed to fail for two reasons. If we get good at it, we think we have changed, but the essence of our evil remains. If we can't get good at it, we despair and quit trying.

But if we know that the essence of our evil is not commandment-breaking, but preferring anything to God, then our focus for change will be a change of heart. That is hopeful, because God promised, "I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11:19).

This is the new covenant that Jesus purchased with his blood (Luke 22:20). We receive it by faith.