



# ROMANS: WEEK IV

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**Previously, in Romans:** *We are moving toward the climax of this remarkable section of Romans, which has said Jesus' life with us leads to no condemnation and to intimate connection with God, even as we all still suffer and wait and hope for full redemption.*

Monday, March 7 – Romans 8:26-30

<sup>26</sup> Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. <sup>27</sup> And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

<sup>28</sup> We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Points of Interest:

- 'we do not know how to pray as we ought' – Truer words have never been spoken. We are so weak and overwhelmed sometimes that we don't even know where to start. Or perhaps our inability to pray is yet another sign of our weakness. Regardless, God is there for us. This is not a sign that the Spirit has left us, but is the very moment in which the Spirit is eager to help. The Holy Spirit living within the child of God pulls our unspoken prayers out to our "Abba" even when all we can do is sigh. Prayer encompasses more than our words – it is broader and deeper than that.
- 'God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes' – We're treading on mysterious ground here, but what a beautiful thought that while being too weak to even know how to pray, we can be at the center of the life of the Triune God – one God comprised of three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. United with Jesus in our lives, the Spirit inside us and the Father hearing our prayers communicate with one another and advance God's will, while we're sighing or sleeping or fumbling in our prayers. Deep.
- 'all things work together for good for those who love God' – This doesn't say that all things *are* good, but that God can take all things and find ways to use them for good. This is more of the meaning of redemption in Jesus, that Jesus has bought our life and freedom, and will continue to take every part of our experience and shape it toward our good.
- 'foreknew... predestined... called... justified... glorified' – This series of verbs has been used to develop some abstract systems of how it is that God works in the world. These systems, particularly in the tradition of Protestant reformer John Calvin, have made God look like a

controlling micro-manager who leaves little room for human choice in the big story of how our lives play out. The context here, though, is God working all things for good in those people that love God. Those are the people God has clearly called and has a purpose for. These verbs further elucidate what that calling and purpose look like. If you love God, Paul's saying, he knew you ahead of time and had good purposes for you (foreknew, predestined). Then God called your name, and gave you standing and importance with God. And now you're on your way toward a future of unimaginable beauty and perfection (justified, glorified). The emphasis doesn't seem to be on people who *don't* seem to love God, but on a bigger picture of what's happening with those who do.

- 'conformed to the image of his Son' – Conformity can be a dirty word in the modern West. But here we're not talking about control, manipulation, or the loss of one's individuality. Instead, it's a reinforcement of all Romans 5 and 6 were about – that God's life plan for you is for you to become like Jesus. Your version of Jesus might not be identical to anyone else's, but it will have all the life and power and peace and truth that attracted you to Jesus, just in your mind and in your skin.
- 'firstborn within a large family' – I love this little note on God's hopes for people connected to Jesus. Not unlike some other parents I know, God always wanted a big family. Jesus, remarkable as he is as a firstborn, isn't enough. God wants lots of other kids, little siblings who bear our own resemblance to big brother Jesus.

Taking It Home:

*For you* – Little siblings in a large family can sometimes feel unseen. Is there any part of your past or present that doesn't look like it fits into this hopeful future for you of God working all things for good? Ask God to share his promise that even *that* will become part of a happy family story. Ask God for hope that every good purpose God has for you will be accomplished.

*For your six* – Pray that God will hear the unspoken prayers of your six and connect them more with God, so they can have the deep sense of purpose that is part of that connection.

**Previously, in Romans:** *We have wrapped up a long overview of the benefits of being united with Jesus, part of God's growing family of faith.*

Tuesday, March 8 – Romans 8:31-39

<sup>31</sup> What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? <sup>32</sup> He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. <sup>35</sup> Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long;  
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Points of Interest:

- 'What then are we to say...?' – This sounds like a conclusion, and indeed it is. So we can expect some summary and some implications – review of the prior content and some sense of why it matters as well. Let's notice some of the summary first, and then some of the celebratory punch of what it all means.
- 'God is for us' – The law of Moses or the laws of nature can make us wonder if God is against us or if God has abandoned us or never been around in the first place. Paul wants to convince us that God is righteous and active in love for us – good, and faithful, and present for our good.
- 'did not withhold his own Son' – Participating in Jesus' sacrificial love for our sakes is the chief evidence of just how much God is for us.
- 'also give us everything else' – The prosperity either of our contemporary moguls and celebrities or of the Roman elite Paul's readers knew about doesn't seem to be in view here. The "everything else" is something richer and better, what Paul has been calling glorification. This is a future, only partly experienced in the present, in which we're united with God's beauty and love and joy and authority.
- 'it is God who justifies' – Paul has used the word justification often in the last several chapters, and I have often referred to it as standing. Here Paul fleshes out that standing by contrasting it to being charged or condemned. To have standing with God is to be above accusation or shame. It is to never fear charges being brought against us. It is to be above rejection and condemnation and judgment.
- 'who intercedes for us' – This is the living Jesus, not just praying for us, but standing in the way of anyone who tries to bring charges or to condemn.
- 'Will hardship, or distress, or persecution... or sword?' In the middle of this review and celebration, we get a pretty vivid window into the difficulties Paul and other first century followers of Jesus faced. There was an awful lot of rejection and hardship involved. Paul isn't left asking "why?" but observing that these supposedly powerful forces are impotent. They can't stop God's good purposes and they can't separate us from God's love. This raises an interesting question for me – given the choice, would I prefer comfort and ease, or purpose and love and belonging?
- 'will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' – The chapter that began with "no condemnation" ends poetically with "no separation." God's love wins again.

Taking It Home:

*For you* – Take a look at the final two verses. Which of those things can seem to threaten separation from God’s love? For me, ironically, it is life, not death. I don’t much fear being disconnected by God after I die, but can experience present life as overwhelming enough to make me wonder how loved I am. What calls God’s love and power into doubt in your life? Ask God to experience God’s love right there, as greater.

*For your city/church* – Pray for people who are most facing rejection and suffering to know God’s love for them today. For people in the world who love Jesus and face these kind of first century persecutions and consequences, pray for God’s courage and love for them as well.

**Previously, in Romans:** *Paul completed an eight chapter-long tour of God’s good news in Jesus, given to Jews first, and then to Greeks.*

Wednesday, March 9 – Romans 9:1-18

9 I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit—<sup>2</sup> I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. <sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh. <sup>4</sup> They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; <sup>5</sup> to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

<sup>6</sup> It is not as though the word of God had failed. For not all Israelites truly belong to Israel, <sup>7</sup> and not all of Abraham’s children are his true descendants; but “It is through Isaac that descendants shall be named for you.” <sup>8</sup> This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as descendants. <sup>9</sup> For this is what the promise said, “About this time I will return and Sarah shall have a son.” <sup>10</sup> Nor is that all; something similar happened to Rebecca when she had conceived children by one husband, our ancestor Isaac. <sup>11</sup> Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God’s purpose of election might continue, <sup>12</sup> not by works but by his call) she was told, “The elder shall serve the younger.” <sup>13</sup> As it is written,

“I have loved Jacob,  
but I have hated Esau.”

<sup>14</sup> What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means! <sup>15</sup> For he says to Moses,

“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy,  
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

<sup>16</sup> So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy. <sup>17</sup> For the scripture says to Pharaoh, “I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.” <sup>18</sup> So then he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses.

## Points of Interest:

- 'I am not lying' – Paul isn't, and I'll try not to! Romans 9-11 is challenging material. Some readers have viewed it as the centerpiece of the whole letter, and others have wondered if it was a tangent that went out of control but then unedited. Like all of Romans, scholars and pastors and priests have had vociferous disagreements over its meaning. But for some of us, this section can feel more abstract, less immediately relevant, and so tougher to slog through than the rest of the book. Paul is clearly getting personal here, but he's also trying to wrestle through the implications of the good news of Jesus for God's larger story and character. Let's see where that takes him, and us.
- 'I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish' – This is an unusually intense way of phrasing the idiom about losing sleep over something. Here it's Paul's pain that most of his fellow first century Jews did not receive Jesus as God's great gift to them. What does this say about God, and about history, and about Paul's own culture and people? If you're Jewish yourself, or closely connected to Jews you care about, you may share these questions. But even if not, we all wonder what it says that some people we love lack interest in Jesus. This raises some of the same questions for us about God and about them. Perhaps we can enter into this material sensitive to that.
- 'for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh' – Calvinist theological traditions have viewed these chapters as an affirmation of the inherent worthlessness of humanity and the justice of a God who freely chooses to have mercy on some humans and reject others. We're reminded again in the introduction that Paul isn't developing a cold-hearted, abstract theological system. Rather, he's trying to come to terms with a personal and painful dilemma. His cousins, his mentors, and likely his parents and his siblings – along with the majority of his culture – seem to have cut themselves off from Jesus. Paul would give away what he has for the chance for them to have it. And so again, how can he and the Romans and we come to terms with this tension that some respond to Jesus gladly and with faith, and others do not?
- 'to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants...' – Earlier in Romans, Paul made the point that Jews have no more honor or privilege than Gentiles – we are all in this together. Now Paul reminds his mixed Jewish/Gentile house churches in Rome of just how wonderful and beautiful has the Jewish experience been. An implication here is also just how much Gentile followers of Jesus owe to the Jewish experience. Rome was a hotbed of anti-Semitism, and Paul offers a strong correction to any of that attitude that might have filtered into the house churches.
- 'from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah' – As much as this shouldn't need saying, Paul reminds everyone that Jesus was Jewish as well. I attended a largely Jewish university in the 1990s, and even then, lots of students raised in culturally Christian contexts had, at one time or another, been told that the Jews killed Jesus. This pernicious past teaching of many church traditions bubbles up still. Here Paul reminds that God could have become a person of any ethnicity he chose, but he became a Jew.
- 'It is not as though the word of God had failed.' – This is exactly the problem that Paul needs to address, that it appeared to some, and maybe even to Paul sometimes, that the word of God had failed. How could God be faithful and persuasive when so many of his first chosen people group didn't say yes to Jesus?

- 'the children of the promise are counted as descendants' – With Abraham, Paul begins retelling of the story of Israel, reminding that who seems to be “in” and “out” of God’s promises has always been complicated.
- 'The elder shall serve the younger.' – My oldest child once noticed – much to her chagrin – what many oldest child Bible readers come across at one point – that the Hebrew scriptures seem to have a thing for the younger ones. God’s always subverting cultural expectations of who will end up closest to God. With this reminder, Paul intentionally highlights some of the Old Testament passages that most seem to indicate God playing favorites, but in the opposite direction of what people might have expected.
- 'He says to Moses, “I will have mercy...”’ – In its original context (Exodus 33 and 34), Moses heard this word from God as an assurance of just how deeply merciful and compassionate God is. God was indicating to Moses that his mercy and love are far greater and longer-lasting than his disappointment and anger. This is a reminder that when Paul is exploring what “in” and “out” mean with God, he’s doing so relative to a God of mercy and compassion beyond what we can usually see right now.
- 'he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses' – Paul applies this remarkable mercy to the story of Israel’s exodus from slavery under the Egyptian Pharaoh. Without ever excusing the Pharaoh’s violence and tyranny, Exodus also says that God hardened the Pharaoh’s heart, that God had agency in increasing this ruler’s stubbornness and resistance. Is this part of how God works in the world, choosing some for favor and rejecting others in hatred? Paul raises this question and says this is certainly God’s prerogative and is one way of understanding his history to this point.

Taking It Home:

*For you* – Who have you known who has appeared to reject faith in Jesus, or to be resistant to God? Has this been your own story at any point? How does this make you feel about God? What hope can it give you that everything depends on God’s compassion and mercy, and that God has limitless supplies of those?

*For your 6* – Have any of your six seen themselves as outside of God’s mercy, or have any of them come to believe that God or the universe is fundamentally unjust. Pray for an experience of undeserved mercy, kindness, compassion, and being chosen.

**Previously, in Romans:** *Paul has begun exploring whether God can still be seen as just and merciful and effective in fulfilling his promises – in short, righteous – even though most Jews seemed to have rejected their Jewish Messiah, Jesus.*

Thursday, March 10 – Romans 9:19-29

<sup>19</sup> You will say to me then, “Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?” <sup>20</sup> But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, “Why have you made me like this?” <sup>21</sup> Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of

the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use? <sup>22</sup> What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction; <sup>23</sup> and what if he has done so in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory— <sup>24</sup> including us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? <sup>25</sup> As indeed he says in Hosea,

“Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’  
and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’”

<sup>26</sup> “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’  
there they shall be called children of the living God.”

<sup>27</sup> And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, “Though the number of the children of Israel were like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved; <sup>28</sup> for the Lord will execute his sentence on the earth quickly and decisively.” <sup>29</sup> And as Isaiah predicted,

“If the Lord of hosts had not left survivors to us,  
we would have fared like Sodom  
and been made like Gomorrah.”

Points of Interest:

- ‘Why then does he still find fault?’ – Paul’s anonymous question asker is back, asking what seem like pretty fair questions. If God has the prerogative to be kind to some and reject others, can we really blame people who seem to be rejecting God?
- ‘who are you... to argue with God?’ – So this is one way to shut down the conversation, but it’s where Paul starts, by insisting that a creator God can do what God wants to do, and it’s not really the business of one who is created to argue. Fair enough, but it’s not where Paul leaves things.
- ‘objects of wrath... objects of mercy’ – One way of reading this contrast is that we’re all like clay pots, some made for God to smash and others for him to enjoy. (But he’s being patient in not smashing some quite yet, even though they are, in fact, destined to be destroyed!) Another way of reading it is that God is having great patience with messed-up pots so that, through the power of Jesus’ good news, they can become objects of mercy. After all, God wants to “make known the riches of his glory,” and what better way – in this metaphor – than by having many pots to pour it into.
- ‘Those who were not my people I will call “my people”’ – In quoting from Hosea, Paul calls to mind a story about Israel, in which people God had adopted are so unresponsive to God that they are compared to adulterous prostitutes. Yet, in Hosea, God can’t help loving them again and again, being faithful even in their faithlessness to make them his beloved spouse/his children again. So again, even while Paul says God has the prerogative to choose some and reject others, he’s inclined to keep turning to people in mercy, waiting for them to say yes to God’s kindness.
- ‘only a remnant of them will be saved’ – In his quotations from Isaiah, Paul completes his retelling of Jewish history from Abraham, through exile, through return. God chose Abraham and some of Abraham’s descendants to be in covenant with God – to experience God’s blessing and mercy and

to respond in faith. Those descendants largely turned away from God, raising the possibility of the end of that promise and covenant. Here too, “the word of God” could have “failed.” (9:6) But a small part of Israel remains responsive to God, called “my people”, “my beloved”, a portion who are saved. First century Jews might have understood this to be the portion of Jews that returned to Jerusalem after their exile. For Paul, it could be Jewish followers of Jesus. It could be Jesus himself. It could be all who trust God and so who are “circumcised in heart” (2:29). It’s too soon to say.

- ‘Sodom and... Gomorroah’ – Cities of pervasive violence and inhospitality that are destroyed in the Genesis story after Abraham asks God to guarantee he’ll be merciful if there are only a few decent people to be found. The implication here is that the Jews have not had this experience – there are survivors.

Taking It Home:

*For you* – What if your life, like a clay vessel, is meant to contain as much of God’s mercy and love as possible? How could this be so for you? Does it help to imagine God calling you “my people” and “beloved”?

*For your city/church* – Have you tended to see your surrounding culture more as a world that God is eager to destroy or which he has prepared for glory? Invite God to fill your city with mercy and glory, as this passage says, and to use it for a special purpose.

**Previously, in Romans:** *Paul has retold the story of Israel, reminding the Romans that God is inclined toward mercy but whether people reject or receive that mercy is unpredictable. So far, both have continued to happen.*

Friday, March 11 – Romans 9:30-10:4

<sup>30</sup>What then are we to say? Gentiles, who did not strive for righteousness, have attained it, that is, righteousness through faith; <sup>31</sup>but Israel, who did strive for the righteousness that is based on the law, did not succeed in fulfilling that law. <sup>32</sup>Why not? Because they did not strive for it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, <sup>33</sup>as it is written,

“See, I am laying in Zion a stone that will make people stumble, a rock that will make them fall, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

10 Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. <sup>2</sup>I can testify that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. <sup>3</sup>For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God’s righteousness. <sup>4</sup>For Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

### Points of Interest:

- 'righteousness through faith' – Paul is back to the language of Chapters 1-4, when he insisted that for all of human history – or at least since Abraham – God has made people right through trusting him, not through human status or achievement.
- 'Gentiles, who did not strive for righteousness, have attained it' – Obviously, given the last chapter, Paul isn't praising all Gentiles and criticizing all Jews. He is highlighting the irony that people who weren't looking to be right with God found it, and that others who cared about this so much have missed it.
- 'a stone that will make people stumble' – So many Jews missed what God was doing because they got tripped up on this stone that God himself put there. What's the stone, and why would God do such a thing?

Well, the stone is likely Jesus, who is sometimes compared to a stone that builders reject who then becomes the cornerstone, the most important stone in the new building. (Psalm 118:22, Acts 4:11) Here Paul is quoting directly from the prophet Isaiah (28:16 and 8:14), again from contexts that many Jews thought related to God's promised King, the Messiah. Jesus – a Messiah who dies to redeem and reconcile rather than conquers to restore land and political freedom – is a disappointment, a reject. But he becomes the centerpiece in God's extension of mercy. On these terms, God isn't trying to trip people up. God offers himself as he is – sacrificial, compassionate, merciful – and can't help it if people don't recognize him.

- 'not be put to shame' – Paul echoes earlier themes that trusting in the shameful scandal of the cross means being free from all of society's honor/shame codes and never again fearing shame.
- 'they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened' – Zeal for God, in Jewish history and in Paul's first century context, was seen as a passion for devoted obedience to God and defending God's honor against human opposition. Paul, just as Jesus did, sees this zeal in an unenlightened passion for God's law that is in opposition to the love and sacrifice and peace seen in Jesus on the cross. God is not looking for "fanatical violence", but "acceptance of grace." (Jewett, *Romans*, 131-132) For now, Paul sees many of his fellow Jews stuck in this kind of zealous so-called righteousness that keeps them from God. He prays that they'll discover God's righteousness in Jesus and set aside their law.

### Taking It Home:

*For you* – There is nothing you can do to make God love and accept you more than he does today. It is all on the basis of faith. If you believe in Jesus, you will never be put to shame. Meditate on these assurances for you.

*For your world* – Pray for the religious zealots of our own time, be they Islamic jihadists or Christian separatists or fundamentalists of any stripe. Pray that they would find "righteousness through faith" and set aside their "law of works" and find peace with God and others.

**Previously, in Romans:** *Paul has been exploring why many of his fellow Jews didn't recognize Jesus as the mercy and compassion of God for them.*

Saturday, March 12 – Romans 10:5-10:13

<sup>5</sup> Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.” <sup>6</sup> But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) <sup>7</sup> “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). <sup>8</sup> But what does it say?

“The word is near you,  
on your lips and in your heart”

(that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); <sup>9</sup> because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. <sup>11</sup> The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” <sup>12</sup> For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. <sup>13</sup> For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Points of Interest:

- ‘the person who does these things will live by them’ – This line attributed to Moses is in several places in Deuteronomy, the last of the Old Testament’s opening five books, often called the law for short. In fact, it’s almost a thesis statement for Moses, and it shows up in a key moment in Chapter 30, which is something of a climactic one. “Do what God says, and you will live!” he says. Of course, in Romans, Paul says it’s rarely that simple. People don’t simply do these things. They have opinions about them, they complicate them, they take the law’s ropes and look for loopholes for themselves and nooses for others.
- ‘but the righteousness from faith’ – Paul is bold enough to say that there’s a better way than what Moses emphasized. Drawing back to his own thesis statement (1:17), Paul says you live when you get the good life out of a trusting relationship. God’s not looking for minions, but partners and friends and children.
- ‘the word is near you’ – Paul digs back to that same chapter of Deuteronomy and wonders if Moses saw this as well, whether or not he realized what he was seeing. The three quotations in verses six through eight are also all from the same thirtieth chapter of Deuteronomy. Moses was saying poetically that God’s words aren’t out of reach for you. Paul takes it further. God’s word is Jesus. And you don’t need to do anything impressive or extraordinary or even particularly mystical to find him. He’s right here, as close as your speech and your mind and your heart.
- ‘confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord’ – If Jesus the word is so near, how do we find him with our lips and heart? One way Paul suggests is a subversive oath of loyalty. To confess with your lips that *Caesar* is Lord is to give your loyalty to the tyrannical regime of Rome. Perhaps you’d say this as you gain your citizenship or serve in the army. Paul subverts this phrase and tells the Romans that if they offer this loyalty to Jesus, they will find rescue and standing in this life and the next. This

feels like both an insult and a promise. It's an insult to the pretend claims to ultimate power that any tyrant or institution can ever make. And it's a promise that Jesus can deliver good to us in ways they never can.

- 'and believe in your heart...' – The loyalty oath is really just the beginning of a compact, but pretty full treatment of connecting with this so-close living word of Jesus. Verses 9-10 are a chiasm, a common Hebrew poetical/rhetorical form that Paul makes use of, even while writing in Greek. Chiasm begins with one thing, moves on to the next, and then reverses course.

Here the chiasm begins with what you say with your lips, then moves to what you believe in your heart, and then reverses, with a repeat of the heart and then another statement about what you say. Chiasm serves to focus attention most in the center, here the two-fold invitation to heart belief. The invitation here is to believe at the center of your being that Jesus has been raised from the dead. That's connected to justification – comfortable and confident standing with God. Why is this so important? Well, if Jesus is no longer dead, he is alive still, able to communicate, to love, to help, to intercede – in short, to be there as our help and friend and backer.

- 'no one who believes in him will be put to shame' – Paul just quoted this line from Isaiah in chapter 9. But it's important enough to bring up in his little summary here. It's hard to emphasize just how much being put to shame was the great fear of both Jew and Gentile in Paul's age. To be exposed as a loser in society's status rankings, to lose standing and reputation and the privileges they conferred – this was the great fear, or the tragic reality, of Paul's audience.

I wonder how much times have changed. In my more honest moments, I am aware that fear of failure and insignificance loom as pretty powerful forces in my imagination, ready to haunt me and drive a defensive, stressful existence. With Jesus, this possibility is off the table. God will be generous to all the Jesus people, regardless of their cultural or religious background, and regardless of their standing in the world. And Paul will insist that these churches mirror this reality as well.

#### Taking It Home:

*For you* – Want to try a "word is so near" moment for yourself? If you're ready, say with your lips, Jesus is Lord. I'll wait, go ahead – "Jesus, you are Lord".... And then ask Jesus for faith to believe that he is risen from the dead, alive and present still. Thank Jesus for making you a child of God and promising that you will never be put to shame.

*For your 6* – Like those people looking up to heaven or the abyss for God, are any of your six in an uphill battle to find meaning and significance and love and standing in the world. Perhaps you don't even know if they feel that way. Pray for them all by name, that they would know Jesus as near to them, advocating for them and giving them all that they are looking for and more.

**Previously, in Romans:** *After grieving over so many of his fellow Jews' rejection of Jesus, Paul has reiterated just how close and good and alive Jesus is, encouraging the Romans that all people who "call on Jesus" will be saved.*

### Sunday, March 13 – Romans 10:14-10:21

<sup>14</sup> But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?

<sup>15</sup> And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" <sup>16</sup> But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" <sup>17</sup> So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.

<sup>18</sup> But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have; for

"Their voice has gone out to all the earth,  
and their words to the ends of the world."

<sup>19</sup> Again I ask, did Israel not understand? First Moses says,

"I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation;  
with a foolish nation I will make you angry."

<sup>20</sup> Then Isaiah is so bold as to say,

"I have been found by those who did not seek me;  
I have shown myself to those who did not ask for me."

<sup>21</sup> But of Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

#### Points of Interest:

- 'but how are they to call...?' – Paul asks a series of leading questions that move from the power of connecting with Jesus to the importance of the people that make that connection possible. Rome has its ambassadors and armies, and Jesus has his messengers. For the Romans, this might call to mind the people that first started their house church communities or perhaps Paul himself.
- 'how beautiful are the feet...' – This sounds like a funny idiom, but it's another Old Testament reference, again from Isaiah (52:7). Paul edits the quotation pretty significantly to suit his context, applying the passage to the good news of Jesus shared by human messengers throughout the earth. But the whole second half of Isaiah shares the narrative arc of the book of Romans – that God, in the person of a servant, will bring renewal not only to Jews but to all the earth. Paul says it's happened, and the people helping make it happen are beautiful, or at least their feet are.
- 'for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed..."' – The disappointment Paul feels that so many people have rejected God's good news is also predicted in Isaiah. Perhaps Paul takes at least comfort in knowing that it's always been this way.

- 'their voice has gone out...' – The quotation in verse 18 is from Psalm 19. The psalm is about the wonders of nature that show everyone the power and beauty of God. Here Paul applies it to the message of Jesus, which is filling his known world as he writes this.
- 'I will make you jealous...' – Now we're back to Deuteronomy again. (32:21) In its original context, Moses is saying that when Israel loses interest in God, God will prosper surrounding nations as a wake-up call for them to come back to him. Here Paul applies the "make your ex jealous" image to his first century context. The good news of Jesus is going out to all the earth, with at least some non-Jews joyfully benefitting from the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel.
- 'Then Isaiah is so bold as to say' – Paul completes another one of his Old Testament mash-ups. I actually get a big kick out of Paul's confidence that in the story of Jesus, he's unlocked the key to understanding such a wide range of Hebrew scripture, often employing it differently than how it was originally understood. Paul ends this section with the powerful image of God extending welcoming hands. People who weren't even looking for God's welcome are receiving it, while those that were originally welcomed are stubbornly turning their backs.

Paul is so glad that the Greco-Roman world is connecting with God through the welcoming hands of Jesus. But he can't get over his frustration and grief that his own people have been too busy interpreting the law and fighting the Romans to receive the welcome God has for them.

#### Taking It Home:

*For you* – How did you first hear about Jesus? What was your initial response? Thank God for his past and present welcome of you. Consider saying thanks, or sending a thank you note today, to someone who was a beautiful messenger of the good news of Jesus to you.

*For your church/city* – Pray that more people from your church would become beautiful-footed messengers of the good news of Jesus. Pray this would happen in ways your city can joyfully respond to and see as God's welcome to them.