

"Our Salvation and The Salvation of The Jews"

We are currently studying the Book of Romans. We have learned that chapters 9 to 11 are written for the Jewish people. The passage we will focus on today is also addressed to the Jews. But the passage is also addressed to us who are not Jewish. Let's read today's passage Romans 10:14-21 as we begin our study on the relationship between our own salvation and the salvation of the Jews.

14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

16 But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" 17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ. 18 But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did:

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

19 Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says,

"I will make you envious by those who are not a nation;
I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding."

20 And Isaiah boldly says,

"I was found by those who did not seek me;
I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me."

21 But concerning Israel he says,

"All day long I have held out my hands
to a disobedient and obstinate people." (Romans 10:14-21)

The first thing we will explore from this passage is about our own salvation. Jesus said

that the end of this world will eventually come. He mentioned about the things that must happen before the end, and one of these was that "the gospel must first be preached to all nations" (Mark 13:10).

2000 years ago, Christianity was born. And just as Jesus said, the gospel is being preached all over the world. There are people who go to live in a foreign land so that they can live among the natives and show them the Word of God, and we call these people missionaries. They leave their home land and go out into all the nations carrying the gospel, to spread the good news.

Some missionaries go to regions of the world that have not yet been explored. In some of these place, the natives practice headhunting, witchcraft, and human sacrifice. The missionaries go to these people and put their lives on the line to preach the gospel, and many of them have lost their lives while fulfilling their call.

There have also been many missionaries who have come to our home country of Japan, and many missionaries are continuing to come from all over the world. Many of the churches in Japan have been founded by these missionaries. Many of the universities and hospitals we know were also originally founded by these missionaries.

One American missionary who was sent to northwestern Japan after WWII reflected about the years he spent in Japan and said, "I was shocked to see the Japanese eating raw egg on rice and nattō (fermented beans). In my country, we eat our eggs cooked and scrambled, and we don't eat rotten beans. Though I was able to put the food in my mouth, I had a hard time getting used to it and felt sick afterwards. But now I love eating raw egg over rice and nattō".

We may smile when we hear this kind of story, but how shocked this missionary must have been when he first saw the raw egg being poured over rice and smelled the nattō and saw its slimy texture. We can only imagine how hard these missionaries worked to love the people of Japan and assimilate into Japanese society. To bring the gospel to the people Japan, they diligently studied the language and at times had to give up their own traditions and culture in order to adapt to the traditions and culture of Japan.

Why do missionaries leave their comfortable lives in their home land to go to a place without even electricity or running water? Why would they go to a land with a different culture and language, where they are sure to face difficulties, and without any guarantee for their health or even their very lives? They don't go out to the mission

field in pursuit of wealth and they do so even though their work may appear unrewarding from an earthly perspective. They are able to do so because they firmly believe that the message they carry is of that much importance and value.

The reason they leave their homes and go to the mission field is quite simple. That reason is found in the words of today's passage: "How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?" (Romans 10:14-15).

For this reason, somewhere in the world today a missionary will board a plane bound for another country. Why? Because people cannot believe in something they have not heard. And they cannot hear without someone preaching to them. And there is no one to preach unless someone is sent. The missionaries take these words to heart and go out to the mission field.

So what is the message that these missionaries carry which has so much value? We must be clear on what that message is. In verse 16 we read Isaiah's words, "Lord, who has believed our message?" (Romans 10:16). The message that these missionaries are laboring to tell in a foreign land is a message that is hard to believe. What is that message? As you see, this quote was taken from Isaiah 53:1.

What is found in the verses after Isaiah 53:1 is a description of how Christ will be crucified and the reason He was crucified. I've mentioned this many times, but Isaiah wrote this prophecy 750 years before Jesus went on the cross. And regarding his prophesy about Jesus' crucifixion, Isaiah said "who has believed our message?".

In other words, Isaiah is saying "who can believe these things I am about to write?". Jesus Christ took our place and was crucified for our sins. Who can believe such a thing? Paul understood the unbelievable nature of this message that he preached, and so do the missionaries who go out today carrying this same message.

The Bible tells us that we are all sinners and we must be judged before God for our sins. But the message of the gospel is that our sins will be forgiven through Christ. Isaiah clearly prophesied this and said, "he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

We can remove graffiti from a wall with a special cleaning solution and some elbow grease. But as I mentioned last week, sin is not something we can erase by our own strength. This is the central theme of the Book of Romans, that we cannot erase sin by doing good works, but sin is something that needs to be forgiven.

2000 years ago, the way to forgiveness has been revealed to us by God through the death of Jesus on the cross. Our sins are forgiven because Jesus bore our sins and took the penalty for our sins all upon Himself. This is why Isaiah said "who can believe this message?". This message is beyond our understanding and we do not have the actual scene of the crucifixion before us today so I cannot point to Jesus on the cross and say "this is what I am talking about".

Regarding this fact, Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, "Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom" (1 Corinthians 1:22). The Jews wanted to see visible signs or miracles like those shown by God to their ancestors. They wanted to see the kind of miracles that are recorded in Exodus like the ten plagues or the parting of the Red Sea. And the Greeks sought for wisdom. Greece was the birthplace of many philosophers and they frequently discussed new philosophies in the streets of Athens. In other words, their discussions focused on wisdom that was purely intellectual.

Today we are no different from them as we seek for signs or things that give us excitement through our senses, and we accumulate information that we think will make us intelligent. Compared to the days of Paul, the means by which we can access these things have advanced greatly. As you all know, through television and the internet extraordinary events happening around the world are constantly being broadcast and an abundance of information can be accessed anytime and anywhere.

As humans, we feel a sense of hope when we are heading towards a new frontier. We feel hope because we imagine that something better is waiting beyond that frontier. In this sense, we may have been more hopeful a century ago. Back then we thought that we could achieve happiness by working hard and overcoming poverty. We believed that if we could give our children the education and opportunities we didn't have, they would prosper and become happy. This is the kind of hope we had back then.

But here we are today a hundred years later, after climbing many mountains, thinking that we would find hope beyond these mountains. And today we have all the things that people hoped for a hundred years ago.

We have reached the place that our ancestors dreamed about, but have we found true happiness? Have we solved all the problems? We are living in the age that they longed to see, but we are still surrounded by problems. Mankind has opened many doors in pursuit of hope and it seems today that we don't have any more doors to open.

We are seeing an ever-increasing trend of human labor being replaced by computers, and many of us are not hopeful but feel anxious towards this trend. This only proves that the kind of signs and wisdom that Paul wrote about will not help us at all when it comes to our fundamental problem.

What then is our fundamental problem? It is the problem which the Bible has been addressing since the beginning of mankind, and that is the problem of sin. The latest cellphones and AIs could not solve this problem. Our smartphones only stir our desire for more and if AI's take our jobs away we may become filled with negative emotions that will cause us to lose control of ourselves.

So there is no better time than now to turn back to the message of the Bible. We were not meant to live only for materialistic gains or intellectual pursuits. Who will believe the message? For only in the unbelievable message of the gospel can we find true hope.

Let's move on to the second point of today's sermon, which is about the salvation of the Jewish people.

In the latter half of today's passage from Romans, Paul makes an interesting remark:

19 Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says,
"I will make you envious by those who are not a nation;
I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding." (Deuteronomy
32:21)

20 And Isaiah boldly says,
"I was found by those who did not seek me;
I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me." (Isaiah 65:1)

21 But concerning Israel he says,
"All day long I have held out my hands
to a disobedient and obstinate people." (Isaiah 65:2)
(Romans 10:19-21)

Moses lived 1500 years before the Book of Romans was written, and Isaiah lived 750 years before it was written. Needless to say these prophets have never met each other in person. But what they have in common is that they both prophesied that God will reveal Himself to the Gentiles (or anyone who is not a Jew, including us), and because of this the Jews will become envious and angry toward the Gentiles. But it also says that God always had His hands held out to the people of Israel.

The Bible we have before us has two parts to it. The first part is called the Old Testament and the second part is called the New Testament. Simply put, the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament is that the Old Testament was written before the birth of Jesus Christ, and the New Testament was written after His birth.

In the days of the Old Testament, God made a testament or covenant with Israel, and any Gentile, or anyone who was not an Israelite, could not be part of that covenant. And although Moses and Isaiah lived in the times of this old covenant, they prophesied that God will reveal Himself to the Gentiles and use the Gentiles to make Israel envious.

They prophesied that God's chosen people Israel will be disobedient and obstinate while the Gentiles will come to know God and become followers of Jesus Christ. And around the time Paul was writing his letter to the Romans, this prophecy had already begun to unfold. Salvation was no longer limited to Israel, but has been extended to every human being. And Paul says that this was the plan God had since the very beginning.

Since the time of Jesus, the gospel has been preached to people all over the world, and today there are 2.2 billion Christians in the world, which is 33.4 percent of the world population. The gospel has spread throughout the world just as God planned and as Gentiles, you and I are living proof of His plan being fulfilled.

Since ancient times and to this day, the Jews have been praying for the coming of a Messiah, but the Messiah they are expecting is different from the Messiah that we Christians believe in. The Jews have far more knowledge of the Old Testament than we do (needless to say they do not believe in Christ so the New Testament is not part of their sacred texts). Above all they can read the Bible in its original Hebrew language so they should have a far greater advantage in understanding the deep truths found in the Bible. There is no doubt that they have read Isaiah 53 and all the other prophecies written in the Old Testament that point to Christ. Yet they still do not believe in Jesus.

Considering these facts, it is perplexing that their hearts could still be closed off toward Christ. How could this be? Paul wrote regarding this and said: "Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious" (Romans 11:11).

Paul wrote that the reason the Jewish people's hearts were hardened toward Christ was for salvation to come to the Gentiles. He continues his explanation by calling this a mystery:

'I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob"' (Romans 11:25-26).

The reason the people of Israel were hardened in part was for the whole Gentile world to be saved, and now that the gospel has been spread to the ends of the earth and many Gentiles have become followers of Christ, the time when all of Israel will be saved could come at any moment.

In this passage, Paul quoted Isaiah 59:20 and wrote, "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob". Here the word Zion refers to Israel's capital and the name Jacob refers to the people of Israel. Some Bible scholars say that this passage is referring to Christ appearing to Israel 2000 years ago while others say that it is referring to the Second Coming of Christ, but either way it means that a day will come for Christ to turn godlessness away from Israel and they will all accept Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Paul was once a hardcore Pharisee. He was the most stubborn Jew among all of his people. But through a dramatic conversion he accepted Jesus as his savior and after that he devoted his life to telling others about Jesus. During those first years, Paul must have reflected on the things he fervently studied as a Pharisee and asked God to show him how they related to Jesus Christ. It was essential for him to understand the unique relationship Christ had with him as a Jewish believer and with the history of his people. And in the passages we read today we saw the answers God gave to Paul.

Today most Jews do not believe in Christ and 99 percent of Jews are not Christian. But there is a small group of Jews who are believers and they are called Messianic Jews.

But a day is coming when all Jews will come to repentance and believe in Christ as their Lord and Messiah. As we see today, evangelism to the Gentiles is nearly completed.

The last 2000 years of world history has been a history of spreading Christ's message to the Gentile world. The world is in God's sovereign control, and in His plan He granted salvation to us Gentiles but He has also not forsaken the Jewish people and remembers His eternal covenant with them, and it is His desire that they too will be saved.

The word repent means to change direction. If there is no hope in the direction we are heading, we have to turn around and change direction. We must change direction and repent of our sins before God, put our faith in Jesus, become a new person in Christ, and begin to walk with God. And in this there is no difference between a Gentile or a Jew. For we are all sinners before God. And both Jews and Gentiles are saved through by believing in Jesus Christ. That is the message of the Bible to all of humanity. In closing let us read the words of Paul, who gave his life to tell this message:

14 I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. 15 That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are in Rome.

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. 17 For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." (Romans 1:14-17)

In His wondrous plan for humanity, God extended salvation to us Gentiles and in the future He will save all Jewish people. Blessed are those who will take His hand and receive by faith the salvation He offers us. Let us pray.

Translated by Keita Machida