



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

## The Pursuit of Righteousness - (Romans 9:30-10:13)

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**[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]**

One of the interesting things that I get to do and I get to enjoy is to - of course serve as a pastor, but then I receive emails from different people, from different things; I also receive emails and not just myself but most of my colleagues - we receive emails from itinerant pastors and worship teams, and they say, "Hey, we will be in your in area in May, or we will be in your area in August and we'd love to come and sing for your congregation. We'd love to come and preach in your church." And so we'd send an email back saying, "Okay so who are you again and what do you preach, is there a sermon we can have access to just so that we can see who you are and what kind of gospel you're preaching." And so they would send us all these materials so that we can gauge to see, "Well should we invite them or not?" See this is the same thing that the Apostle Paul did when he was writing to the church in Rome. He hadn't been to Rome, he hadn't planted the church yet, he didn't plant the church in Rome, he was on his way to Spain and so he chooses to write a letter so that the letter can go before him, so the people in Rome - the church in Rome can see, the Christian church in Rome - can see the gospel he's preaching. Now he'd been preaching in other churches and preaching the gospel constantly, and there's various opposition that comes. So when he's writing to the Romans, he writes a beautiful letter - when you come to chapter 8 - chapter 8 is a chapter that I would consider one of the most *beautiful* chapters in the entire Bible - *loaded* with wonderful, amazing promises to the Christian. But see Paul knows the Jew and some Gentiles in Rome are asking themselves the questions, "Can God be trusted? Can God be trusted?" Why - why are they asking the question? Because yeah God is giving all these promises in Romans 8 - Paul is saying, "Hey God is doing this, that and the other." But God gave the nation of Israel forever and ever promises in the Old Testament - has God fulfilled those promises? Ahh no. Why? Because the Jews have *rejected* God. So can God be trusted? And so Paul chooses now, "Okay I'm going to engage this question head on, and I'll engage it, I'll give you two answers." The first is what we'll be looking at these past two weeks - the doctrine of election where Paul is very clear saying, "Hey, God has repeatedly demonstrated that he operates by sovereign choice, in the Old Testament, and coming into the New." Throughout the Old Testament God has been operating with sovereign choice, so you'll see he chose Isaac over Ishmael; he chose Jacob over Esau; Moses over Pharaoh; like God is doing all this amazing things there and you may listen to that and even hearing this and say, "How dare he, this is so not fair, so not fair. Why would God do this?" Then how can he hold someone responsible if he is the one who sovereignly choosing who will become a Christian and who will follow him. This is so unfair, to which Paul responds and says, "Hey God is the potter, humanity the clay, since when did the clay start speaking back to the potter?" In other words, what Paul is saying here is God is King. If God is King, he's



meticulously sovereign he can do whatever he wants, God is King, he can do whatever he wants. But that's not all that Paul says, in today's text, he'll also say; God is judge. So if God is the judge, this means that he's judging people - based on what; based on their choices, which means then Paul is saying, "Hey human beings have a choice. So yes God is sovereign but human beings are also responsible." And what's interesting is Paul is very comfortable putting these two things together: that God chooses but then human beings are responsible. And so now the challenge for us is - how do we square these two? How do they fit? And for Paul, hey he doesn't tell you how they fit, the Scriptures will not tell you how these two fit, they're two parallel truths that the Scriptures do teach: that God sovereignly elects but people are also responsible. How do they jive - the Bible doesn't tell us. Now for our time this morning, we don't have time to really dig and to work our way as to how do these two doctrines work together - for that treatment I want to recommend a book, it's written by and author called, J. I. Packer, who is a professor of theology at Regent College in Vancouver. His name is J. I. Packer, the book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, by J. I. Packer - very accessible, easy read, but man he has some really good content in this book- why should we evangelize if God truly is sovereign. And so you would deal with this issue in that book and I'll leave you with that.

For today's purposes, Paul is now still answering that question: can God be trusted? Can God really be trusted here? And Paul is saying, yeah people are responsible. People are responsible, and so in what way is the nation of Israel responsible? In what way ... were they responsible? And then Paul will go on to say, "Hey they were pursuing righteousness but they did not attain it, they were pursuing righteousness they didn't attain righteousness." So the question is: how do you attain righteousness - and righteousness here means they were morally right, they fulfilled God's moral standards. So to be righteous is to fulfill God's moral standards - to meet his standards so that you're good with him, you're great with him. So how does someone attain righteousness - because the Jews pursued it, did not attain it. So two things that we'll be looking at this morning. First, righteousness is not attainable through human effort. It's not attainable through human efforts. Second, it's attainable through faith in Jesus.

### **[Not Attainable through Human Effort]**

So, not attainable through human effort. Do you have a friend who is a prankster? Friend who just loves playing games and tricks at you; they scare you, they put vaseline on your door handle, those kinds of friends, right. Someone like Jeff who would do something like this [laughter]. So now I want you to imagine, you're now busy at work, maybe you own an old piano that's in your house it's now become an eyesore; it's off tune, it's falling apart, it's collecting dust, you want this thing out. So you invite your buddies - of course you invite your buddies, who will come and move this thing, so you're busy trying to move this piano, you want to get it through the corners of your house and maybe down the steps out of your front door and into a truck. And so you're busy right there at the front door trying to get this heavy piano through and this prankster friend of yours takes a block of wood and places it right by your feet intentionally. Now you didn't see them doing that, but they do that, and so you step on it, slip and this piano kind of like goes to fall and maybe squeezes your hand by the door jam. How would you feel? Would you be thrilled by your friend right now - would you be laughing with them? No!



You would be good and mad. Why would your friend put a stumbling block on your way, and yet you're busy doing something here that needs to be done? You'd be good and mad at your friend and you may have some choice words for them right? What if it was God who intentionally put a stumbling block on your path. What would you think of him then? What would you say to him if God intentionally put a stumbling block on your path?

Well let's read Romans 9:30-33,

“What then shall we say? [This is Paul speaking, he's talking about, so he's responding to what he's talked about, God's sovereign election. God is King. He can do whatever he wants. What shall we say then, he says] That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone. As it is written: 'See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall [the word, fall, there - you could also replace it by a rock that will offend people], and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.'”

See I lay a rock, a stone in Zion, one that will cause people to stumble - so it's intentional that God is doing this. So I'll give you an example, so there's a lady who I used to call Grandma and she's long since passed away a number of years ago. And Grandma was an amazing person, she was one of these people who you would look at and say, “Man I wish she was a Christian.” Why - because she was awesome. She *loved* the kids within the community. She baked for people. She was on a fixed income, but anyone who would ask for help, she always would just give them what she had. She would support Food for the Hungry, and Compassion, and all these things she would do. She loved her children, she was married to a very difficult man who long since passed and she was widowed for a number of years, but this guy was a jerk. And she was married to him, gave her a difficult time, but she was faithful and loving toward him. She was a good person. So of course, there's Grandma, so I decide, “Hey let's go and share the gospel with Grandma.” So we go, we share the gospel you know: God created all things, then man rebelled, Christ redeemed and he will come and restore all things. So I'm sharing the gospel, so when I come to, “Hey man rebelled, God created but man rebelled against God, and now nothing good, man can do nothing, to gain favour with God. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, which means sinners are destined for judgement of God.” She said, “Woah, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait... you mean to say that all the good things that I have done don't count for anything?”

“Yes Grandma, they don't count for anything, all have sinned, fallen short of the glory of God.”

“So you mean to say, that God would now judge me and send me to eternal hell because I didn't believe in Jesus, but I've been really good and doing all these really good things?”

“Yes Grandma, unless you believe in Jesus, your good works mean nothing.” Her response quote, “I can't believe in a God who would do that.” See for her she was doing good, good, good, good, good, therefore her good works would merit heaven and I came and I told her, this is not what the gospel is teaching and she said, “I can not believe in a God who would do that.” Ladies and gentlemen, she just



stumbled over the stumbling block. She just stumbled because God put the stumbling block there to say, “You’re good works, not good enough. Not. Good. Enough. Not good enough.”

How is Christ a stumbling stone to the Jews? How was he a stumbling block to the Jews? See the Jews assumed that we just need to be good and obey, and obey and be good, and be good, and be good enough! That’s why Paul is saying here, they pursued righteousness, this right standing with God, verse 32, because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They were busy, they were zealous as we shall see in Romans 10:1-4, let’s read together,

“Brothers and sisters [he says, Romans 10:1, brothers and sisters], my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. [Oh he wants them to become Christians.] For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God [man they have passion for God], but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not *submit* [there’s the word - they did not submit] to God’s righteousness. Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”

Man they were zealous, they were zealous. It’s like you know *American Idol*, you’ve watched this show, or *America’s Got Talent*, and you have all these contestants, and so there I am seated watching watching *America’s Got Talent* and then you see you - when a contestant is coming they would show you the backstory, this person is in their home and they’ll show you stories about them and what they do and how they believed they’re just the best musician ever and they’re next rising star. And you’re thinking, “Man this guy will really sing, or this girl man, she’s just going to bring it.” So they come to the stage, lights are there, the judges are there, a short interview, “Okay, sing away.” The music starts and I’m like, “Oh I know this song.” So I start, okay <dancing> let’s see this person singing [laughing] and then they open their mouth and oh dear [laughter], oh my, like you know they’re certain performances that are train wreck and you start laughing and then there are others where you don’t know whether to laugh or I don’t even know what to do with that. It’s that bad, but the person they’re into it, like they’re really into it - they’re so zealous, they so think they have it going on. And they don’t! [Laughter] And then the performance is done and the judge, the judges will just say, “Hey dude, we have to commend your zeal, man you are so passionate aren’t you?” And the guy’s like, “Yeah, yeah!” “But you can’t sing, you should find a different line of work.” [Laughter] I have a personal story about that, but that’s for another sermon, you may have to come back.

They were zealous, they were so zealous in fact, the Pharisees they went through the Old Testament and found out that there were 613 commands in the Old Testament. And so what did they decide to do? 613 commands that you needed to keep in order to be righteous with God - in order to be in good standing with God. So what they decided to do is let’s put a hedge around these commands so that we don’t break them. What is a hedge you may ask? My son delivers papers in Abbotsford so you have probably seen him, like running around your house just dropping papers off and things like that. And he works for the *Abbotsford Newspaper*. He’s been lazy for years, so I kind of thought, “Okay let’s get some work ethic in you.” So Wednesday and Friday he’s delivering papers, he’s done this for a year and, “Son, good job.” So you’ve done this for a year, and so this past summer he decided, he



had saved up all his money, his earnings, and he bought himself a computer. So I said, “Son, great job. It’s a beautiful computer. But computers and liquids don’t go together. So if you’re drinking your pop, or your ice tea, or water next to your computer you really want to be careful because if you tip that thing and the water goes on the keyboard, it might not end well.” He’s like, “Oh really? Okay then, we’ll have a rule.”

“What’s the rule?”

“There will be no liquids in my room - period! Like no liquids; no drinks, no nothing, not even standing in his room, far away from his desk, with nothing, no liquids in my room - even when it’s in my backpack, it’s not going to make it’s way in my room, lest for some reason the water bottle finds its way on my desk and pours itself on my computer.” Like he has a ridiculous rule and he’s very firm about that. His sister’s not allowed in his room with anything in their hands, not wet hands, not a drink, nothing. That is a rule, a hedge, that he has put around the real rule; hey be careful if you have a drink next to your machine. Like it’s a ridiculous thing, but, let’s put a hedge around it. He’s passionate about his machine that he paid for using his own money.

See the Jews, who were passionate about God, and they did not want to break any laws, and so they put a hedge around these 613 commands that the Pharisees had already figured out from the Old Testament. We don’t want to break any laws, but in so doing, they totally missed the point, that Christ *is* the point of the law. They totally missed that completely and broke it in three ways. The first, they lacked knowledge, and it’s not that they didn’t have access to knowledge. The prophets had already been speaking about Christ and the Messiah coming - totally missed that - because they were focusing on obeying the law, obeying the law. So they didn’t have knowledge and so they establish their own way of getting righteous before God. They establish their own route, and not only that, they refused to submit, they refused to submit to Christ.

See it’s like - let’s say you are on a triathlon, on steroids. So not only are you going to do the run and the cycling and the swimming, no but throwing in there you’re going to do the mud course where you’re going into mud and crawling under barbed wire and climbing up all sorts of obstacles and things like that. Imagine if you had a race like that, you run through terrain like this, swimming, cycling, and running for a whole year, or even two years, and there’s a time limit to it, it’s an impossible - you can not make it. Now it’s not about winning the race, it’s about finishing the race, if you finish there’s a banquet waiting for you. So there you are running and running, and trying and running, and trying and then someone who has come and has finished the course comes beside you with a nice little buggy and tells you, “Hey buddy, you can’t finish this race, this is an impossible task. They’re people who will die and never finish. Jump onboard. I will take you on my buggy, all the way to the finish line and into the banquet.” And you’re saying, “No way, I don’t want anything to do with that. Get out of here, I got to keep running, I got to keep running.” This is the Jews now, Christ comes and says, “Hey I finished the race - just jump on in, jump on in, and I’ll take you to the finish line, right into my banquet.” “No, no, no, you get away, get away. We got to do this, we got to do this.”

It’s like hey here’s this fence that you need to climb over and Christ opens the gate and says, “Hey there’s a gate here, open gate.”

“No, no, no, I got to climb.”



“There’s an open gate you don’t need to keep sweating and scratching.” It’s all they’re sweating and scratching themselves. Sadly, they’re many Christians who are like this - there are many of us who are like this. When you pray, and pray, and God is not answering that prayer the way you want him to answer this prayer, what do you do? “Okay I’ve got to be good. I got to do good, I got to do good, I got to do good, my kids have to be a certain way, my spouse has to be a certain way, we got to go to church and do this, we got to do, A, B, C, D, E, we have to be just perfectly right so that God can bless me. The reason God is not blessing me is because we’re not good enough.” Or, they’re are some who, “I try to be good, I try to be good, I really try, I try, I try, I try; I try and read the Bible, I try and give, I try and do this, I try and do that, but my kids are just crazy and I do this and my business is going haywire and I’m so not good enough. I give up. Forget it, I can not do this anymore, I’m done.” They walk away, is that you? You see they’re are some who are moralists. It’s all about keeping rules and keeping lists so that you can earn God’s favour and the Scriptures will say, “Huh, you’re good works ain’t good enough, your good works ain’t good enough.”

### **[Attainable through Faith in Jesus]**

You see there is the third kind of person who is running the race and they realize, “I can’t run this race, I can’t run this race, I can’t run this race, I am so not good enough, I don’t have what it takes in me, I can’t.” And then Christ comes alongside with his buggy and says, “Hey buddy, how are you doing? You still running?”

“I can’t run, I can’t run.” Christ says, “Hey you know I can help you.

“Oh really?”

“Yeah, jump on board, I’ll take you to the finish line.” And they jump on board, see for this kind of person, this kind of person, righteousness is attainable through faith in Jesus. They realized, “I can not run this race. I will not finish. The only way I’m finishing this course if I jump onto Christ’s buggy and we go to the finish line, where he’ll now usher me into his banquet, his champions banquet. That’s the only way I’ll get there.”

Righteousness attainable through faith in Jesus, look at Romans 10:5,

“Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: [this is what Moses said] ‘The person who does these things will live by them.’”

“The person who does these things will live by them,” what Moses means by that is that is, “Hey here’s the law of God, if you follow this law to the ‘t’ you will finish the race. But here Paul is implying there is no one who can finish this race. There’s no one who can keep God’s law perfectly because if you break one - you have a dirty pot, or you say something bad or a bad attitude, you’ve broken the law, you don’t qualify, you only need to break it once, that’s it. Just once, you don’t qualify. You say one lie, done! You think an evil thought - done! Bad attitude - done! No one can meet the standard. Nobody. Romans 10:6-7,



“But the righteousness that is by faith says: ‘Do not say in your heart, “Who will ascend into heaven?”’ (that is, to bring Christ down) ‘or “Who will descend into the deep?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).”

What he means by that there is. hey, now what does Christ’s law say, what does the law of righteousness says, hey righteousness is by faith, what does it say? It says this, you do not need to go into the heavens to seek out Christ or go to the world of the dead to seek out Christ. In other words, you don’t need to do anything supernatural in order to be close to God. Romans 10:8-13,

‘But what does it say? [This is what it says] ‘The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim: [verse 9] If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be [what? You will be] *saved*. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are [what?] *saved*. As Scripture says, ‘Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.’ [Meaning you will never end up in hell, you will not be judged, verse 12] For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, [why?] for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be [what?] *saved*.’”

“Everyone, who calls, on the name of the Lord will be saved.” God has done what people are unable to do. See God created all things, but man rebelled. We were rebels, relationship broken, we could not reconcile ourselves to God even if we wanted to - we couldn’t, and we didn’t want to. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this, while we were still rebels, sinners - Christ died for us. So God created, man rebelled, Christ redeemed; he paid the price for your rebellion and mine. And he will restore one day. God was able to do what we were unable to do. You see, it’s like an image of a parent, a set of parents, who now want to adopt a child. And so they go to this orphanage, be it in Africa, pick the country, or the Dominican, or Mexico. They walk into this orphanage and they see these kids running around, orphan kids, kids destitute, they don’t have anything. Poverty all over the place - their future dark. The parents come, they see these kids and the kids are trying to do they’re laundry and clean up their rooms and try to do their work as best as they can, but can these kids remove themselves from their situation - they can not. They’re destitute. They’re future, not bright. They’re they are, and so the parents they do what? They take the paperwork, they begin to fill the paperwork, the child is not helping their adopting parents to fill out the paperwork. The child is not helping their adoptive parents to pay the mortgage on the house where they’re room will be, where this child will live. Not helping with the mortgage at all, not helping with the fees, not helping with the airfare, nothing! The parents do *everything*. And then they show up at the orphanage and stand there and then say, “Son or daughter, come on over.” And the child, all they have to say, “Yes.”

God has done what man was unable to do. God has done what man was unable to do. So how then do we get into this right standing? How do we get this righteousness of God? Two ways - first confess that Jesus is Lord, verse 9. Second, believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. You see to believe in your heart means to commit oneself in the deepest level. To commit yourself in the deepest level, to the truth that has just been revealed to you, and the truth that you’ve just experienced. You’re committing the deepest part of you, but yes, this is true. And not only that, it’s not



just something that happens inward, then you - you use words to express that conviction. You see I met a friend of mine this past week and he was, we were at a restaurant. By the way, just as a side note here, when you meet your Christian friend, and maybe you've met for a number of years and you know them, if you don't know how they became Christians, please ask them to share their testimony with you. It's great stories of how God has transformed the lives of people. So I talked to my buddy at the restaurant, I asked him, "Buddy - how did you become a Christian." So he said, "Oh, I grew up Catholic, then I left the church, was so disgruntled with the church and began just living for myself, doing all the crazy things. Met this girl, we fell in love, we started living together common-law, we had a child, but man we were fighting like dogs and fighting and fighting and things were just going crazy - work was not going well, our family was just in a mess - in 6's and 7's. And we're just fighting constantly until one time she said, 'Where is God in all of this?' and then I said, 'Well let's go find him!'" So I phoned," he says, "I phoned a friend, no a relative who I knew was a Christian and asked them, 'So where do you go to church, like maybe we may just want to come to church.'" Because now he's on a quest, "Let me just try and see if God can answer, take care of all my junk here." So he goes to church and listens to the pastor and then he takes a connecting card and fills it out and puts it in the basket, hoping that maybe someone will call him. Later that week pastor phones, pastor says, "Hey let's go for a coffee." They go to coffee. Sitting down there the pastor begins to share the gospel. God created, man rebelled, Christ redeemed, Christ will restore. So the pastor walks through the gospel message clearly, articulating what the gospel is, and the guy's listening, listening, and then at the end the pastor says, "Hey, it's truth time now, are you going to become a Christian, do you want to become a disciple of Jesus?" The guy said, "You know what, I'm a man of my word, I don't think so. Not ready quite yet to make that step of faith. But you know I'll think about it." The pastor said, "Okay. No bother, that's fine. Can I pray for you at least?" I said, "Ah sure fine, you can pray." So they're praying, as they're praying, as they're praying, all of the sudden my friend says, man he felt a huge weight come over him. And it was like, what in the world is happening? And he began to melt, so he begins crying and doesn't know why, he's crying, oh my, and the pastor notices, man that this guy is now feeling convicted. And so the pastor finishes praying, says, "Amen," looks at the guy and says, "I will leave you with that," [Laughter] and he goes. So the guy is seated there, he's melting away, and he's seated there crying and everything, he wipes himself and then he goes to his truck, goes away. Now this is a manly man, he's a dude, he's a manly man, he doesn't cry in public. Three weeks he's been wrestling with, "What just happened in the restaurant, and at home things again are just a nightmare; fight, fight, fight. And so three weeks later he's driving to work in the morning. He just had to pull over, "Okay Lord, okay I give up, I give up." You see at that moment it's like Christ came with his little buggy, "Hey dude, you still runnin? Jump on. I'll talk you to the finish line, and I'll welcome you into my party. Jump on." And this guy jumped in, and for that person Paul says, for this one I will never put to shame. Christ will say, the one who believes in him will not be put to shame. They will be vindicated when Christ comes to judge. They will be vindicated. He ends with Romans 10:13,

*"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord [anyone who calls, everyone] will be saved."*

Question: are you here today and you don't know Jesus? It's a straight question. You know either, you might be one of two ways, either your life is really difficult and you've been running, running, running and trying to climb and trying to get things done and Christ comes alongside and says, "You know what, are you still running? Quit running, I finished the race for you. Jump on, I'll help you, I got you."



Or maybe your life is going *all good* and you're doing great things and there's no problems at all - things are going just fine and you think you're a good guy. Guess what, your good works mean nothing! They mean nothing. They mean nothing. Because they'll be a day when you'll have to give an account before God and if all you have is your good works, ain't good enough, ain't good enough. Embrace Christ, embrace Christ as Saviour. So how do you do it? You may have come here with someone, ask them how you can become a Christian. If you came alone, talk to either one of the pastors you see around or anyone on the stage here, or go to the info booth. We'd be more than happy to tell you more about this Jesus and how you can know him as Saviour. Let's pray together.

Father we thank you for this morning and we thank you for your word. We thank you that righteousness can not be obtained through human effort, but can only be attained - a right standing can only be attained through faith in Jesus. So Lord we bring ourselves to you, we say Father would you have mercy over us. For those of us who are not Christians, Lord how I pray in Jesus name, would you reveal yourself in profound ways. Father thank you for these moments you've given us to interact with your Word, grant us hearts of thanksgiving even in a weekend like today, grant us hearts of thanksgiving for what you accomplished on the cross on our account. Grant ourselves now to you Lord in Jesus name, Amen.