

What is it to Call on the Name of the Lord

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Call on the Lord

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Bible Text: Romans 10:13

Preached on: Sunday, October 31, 2010

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Turn with me in your Bibles to Romans 10. I am just going to read one verse in the beginning and that verse is verse 13.

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”¹

I don't think there can be any doubt that there is the promise of salvation here. And in the context of this chapter “whosoever” speaks, I am sure, of that distinction that has long been made between Jew and Gentile.

Whosoever, Jew or Gentile, young or old, rich or poor, male or female and he says there that they shall be saved. That means rescued, delivered, redeemed, found. And it speaks of that salvation that is in the past tense and the present tense and in the future tense. They will be saved from sin, saved from Satan, saved from self, saved from everything that would destroy us, body and soul.

And I think it is also clear here that this salvation is of the Lord. They will be saved. They will not save themselves. They will not be made savable. And it is clear that the Lord must do it or there would be no need to call on the name of the Lord.

And I think it is furthermore obvious that this is a sure and a certain promise. They shall be saved. And God who is faithful and who is able and who is unchangeable, he is the one who has promised this.

But this morning I want you to notice something else here, something that men make little of or never attach to the “whosoever.” They like to make statements like this. They say, “We have a whosoever gospel.” But in truth there is no such thing as a whosoever gospel, because if I remember correctly, from my elementary school grammar days, “whosoever” is one of those pronouns that cannot stand by itself. It has to have some description nearby to distinguish it.

¹ Romans 10:13.

And so what we have here is something that is very particular and something that is distinguishing concerning those who shall be saved. And rather than saying simply anybody can be saved, this verse tells us exactly who will be saved.

Can you look at this verse and see this morning who it is that God has said will be saved?

Well, he says, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”²

That is my message this morning. What is it to call upon the name of the Lord?

Is it just simply, as I have heard it described so many times by preacher, is it simply to call by the lips or in the mind on the Lord? Is it, as they say, to pray the, quote, sinner’s prayer?

Well, I don’t think it can be that in light of what the Lord Jesus Christ says in Matthew seven when he says:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.³

You see, one of the most dangerous things that we can do is to attach a logical meaning rather than a biblical and a spiritual meaning to these words, to ascribe to them a meaning that would get a lot of professions of faith, build a big number on the church roll, get immediate results, be generally accepted and release men and women from having to find out what it means to call on the name of the Lord.

What is it to call on the name of the Lord? I really want to know that. I want to know that because all who do shall be saved. And the only way that we can ever find out what that means is to do what the Bible teaches us and that is to compare Scripture with Scripture.

And Paul is talking here about the necessity of both Jew and Gentile hearing and knowing and believing the gospel of Jesus Christ that they might be saved. In other words, this is exactly what the prophet said.

Joel, in his prophecy says, “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.”⁴

² Ibid.

³ Matthew 7:21-23.

⁴ Joel 2:32.

Not only Joel, but Zephaniah. He says, “For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.”⁵

All of these prophets and others talking about this calling on the name of the Lord. And then in Acts chapter two the apostle makes reference to this. He says, concerning that day of Pentecost, he says:

“But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel... that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”⁶

And Joel was speaking of a people who would call upon the name of the Lord because he first would call them.

Zephaniah was speaking of a people who in calling upon the name of the Lord they would serve him with one consent. It must be pretty important. And Paul gives us in this chapter what is required if they are to call upon the name of the Lord. He tells us that they must have faith.

Look down in verse 14.

“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?”⁷

In other words, the knowledge of the truth of the gospel is essential to faith. He doesn't just say believe or believe anything. He is talking here about believing the truth, believing the true gospel. He is talking about not just believing or not just a Lord, but he tells us how this knowledge of the truth comes from hearing. He says, “Hearing the Word of God.”

And no one can and no one will and no one ever has called on the name of the Lord apart from the Word of truth made effectual in their hearts by the Spirit of God, because it is out of a regenerated heart that we truly call upon the name of the Lord and it requires a new birth and a revelation of the word of truth which is something that we cannot do and which shows us how this superficial calling on the name of the Lord cannot be what is being spoken of here.

So to find out what it means to call upon the name of the Lord, I think maybe the best thing is to go to what some call the law of first mention. So turn back in your Bibles to the book of Genesis and look with me in Genesis chapter our and listen to what is being said here in Genesis chapter four beginning in verse 25.

⁵ Zephaniah 3:9.

⁶ Acts 2:16, 21.

⁷ Romans 10:14-15.

And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD.⁸

That is the first time in the Bible that this expression is used. And if you remember what happened, of course, the fall has already taken place and Adam and Eve have been cast out of the garden and their first two sons are born and one of them rises up, Cain rises up and kills Abel. And in this the two lines that we find all the way through this book, the two lines begin to manifest themselves, those who believe God and who worship God in the way that he has prescribed and those who do not believe, but seek to worship a God of their own imagination by their own works and wills and ways.

And now as these families begin to grow and as these two lines begin to manifest themselves and people begin to join together, these separated themselves from those who could be described as the descendants of Cain and they sought to worship God in the way of Abel and in the way God had prescribed.

And that is what you find all the way through this book. Those who worship as idolaters, as unbelievers and those who call upon the name of the Lord.

Now who does Paul, who is the writer of Romans 10, who does Paul give as the great example of faith, as the great example of those who believe? Is it not Abraham?

Well, turn over to Genesis chapter 12 and listen to what it says in Genesis chapter 12 concerning this very man Abraham in Genesis 12 and verse eight.

It says, “And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.”⁹

Turn over to chapter 13 and verse four.

It says, “Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the LORD.”¹⁰

It seems to me that everywhere he went one of the things it says concerning Abram or Abraham as he became, is that he called on the name of the Lord.

Look over in Genesis 21 verse 33.

⁸ Genesis 4:25-26.

⁹ Genesis 12:8.

¹⁰ Genesis 13:4.

“And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God.”¹¹

I will show you one more in Genesis chapter 26 and verse 25. Here, likewise, “And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac’s servants digged a well.”¹²

But not only does this say these things concerning Abraham, it says the same thing concerning David. I will read this to you from 1 Chronicles.

It says, “And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering.”¹³

What does it mean to call upon the name of the Lord?

Well, in every one of these passages to call upon the name of the Lord is in these passages to worship the Lord. And to call upon the name of the Lord implies coming to the Lord and calling on him in that one way that he has appointed.

You see, when Abel was slain he was slain by Cain who was angry at him for doing the one thing that would surprise us, I suppose, and that was for calling on the name of the Lord in that one way that God had appointed.

When you hear what is said in Acts 22, Ananias saying to this man Saul on that very first occasion of seeing him, he said, “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”¹⁴

There are a lot of people this very day who will think they have called on the name of the Lord. But they haven’t. They will think that they have worshipped God, but they will not have. Because to call upon the name of the Lord as we see in all these places is to worship the Lord and it is to come before God recognizing, confessing and reverencing him as he is.

You haven’t worshipped God if you haven’t worshipped God as he is. And how is it that those who do call upon him know who he is? It is through the very Word of God and that is why men and women aren’t calling on the name of the Lord because they are ignorant of him and they don’t know the truth about him and they have heard all these distorted and perverted representations of him especially by religion.

Paul said, “You can’t call on him of whom you have not heard.”

¹¹ Genesis 21:33.

¹² Genesis 26:25.

¹³ 1 Chronicles 21:26.

¹⁴ Acts 22:16.

And if you and I have any wonder as to whether or not men and women have heard of the true God of the Bible, just start telling them a few things about him and you will immediately find out, for the most part, they don't have a clue of who you are talking about. He is not the Lord.

You see, to call upon the name of the Lord is to call upon him as the sovereign Lord and King that he is. And it is to own him as right in all that he does, holy in all that he is, just in all his judgments. It is to come with repentance toward God.

Not too many people talking about repentance and faith or they just talk about repenting of all your sins. You don't even know what all your sins are, because the Bible when it speaks of repentance speaks in a joint manner with faith. He talks about repentance and he talks about faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but he talks about repentance towards God. Those who call upon the name of the Lord repent of all their false notions, all their false belief concerning God as they once thought he was, as they once believed what religion said he was. It involves repentance toward God.

And it is to come before him confessing, as the publican did, just exactly what we are as nothing but sinners, absolutely worthy of nothing but the judgment of God, helpless and worthless, unable to save ourselves, appealing and applying to him for mercy and confessing that it is his to give or withhold.

There is a pleading in this. And it is to approach God and call upon him and ask of him and receive of him in that one way through the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. His name is the name that I above every name. His name is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ which speaks of his renown.

When I was growing up somebody would say of a man, they would say something like this. He has a name for being a good worker. Or they might say this. He has a name for not wanting to do nothing but fish. That means that which characterized him for exactly what he really was. And to call upon the name of the Lord is to call upon him as that one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

But let me tell you what is central to this. And all we really have to do is to look back at every one of these references to find it out that it is true and that is that to call upon the name of the Lord is to approach God and worship God and praise God and thank God through Jesus Christ crucified.

You say, "How can you be so sure?"

Well, it is to desire to be viewed and looked upon by God only in this crucified Christ.

How do you know that?

Did you notice the one thing, at least to me it stands out, that was central to and necessary

for Abraham or David or whoever it is in this Old Testament that which is necessary for them to worship God and to call upon the name of the Lord?

What is necessary? Sacrifice. In almost every one of these references, everywhere Abraham went, every time David worshipped, every time any Israelite ever worshipped God it says something like this, Abraham especially. And Abraham did what? Built an altar.

[?] What did he want to build an altar for?

Well, I know that God gave this prescription for an altar. He said, “You take stones as you find them on the ground and you raise up to me an altar. You don’t take chisel or hammer or anything to that stone, just as it is, as I provide it, you take that, build up an altar and you do what? You offer a sacrifice.”

No sacrifice? No worship.

No sacrifice? No calling upon the name of the Lord.

You see, to call upon the name of the Lord is from our heart to plead only the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the day that we do not gather publicly or bow privately and seek to come before God, be forgiven by God and be blessed of God and saved by God, the day we come upon any other ground, we not only are not worshipping, we are not calling upon the name of the Lord.

It is the way it is.

You see, it is to rest in the cross death of the Lord Jesus Christ who is, himself, the Lamb of God as the only way that God can be just and yet justify us as sinners. In other words, Abraham or David or Isaac or whoever it was, they called upon the name of the Lord by sacrifice and the sacrifice was the one which pictured that one sacrifice for sins forever. The one way not only that God has said, but the one way in which God has as this just God and a Savior saved me from my sins.

I know how we are, because I am the worst. I can come either in private or I can come gather as we have this morning and if I am not really careful, before I think about it I will start dealing with this condemning conscience by trying to look at some things that I have done or I have not done. It won’t work, not the first day, not the last day.

He says that the way of righteousness which is simply the righteousness of God is all bound up in this sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why Paul says again and again in one way or another, “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”¹⁵

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 2:2.

I know folks say of us that we never seem to get beyond this. We never get beyond preaching the gospel of the cross. Some people are looking and they say, “Well, yeah, we believe all that, but we need to know how to live.”

No, we need to hear about life which is only through the death of the Savior.

To call upon the name of the Lord is to look to the Lord Jesus Christ, not just in some mystical way, not in at this generic Jesus, but to look at him as the one—as I said earlier—who is who he is and who actually accomplished this salvation by his sacrifice, that he established this righteousness which is simply how God has dealt with us in a righteous way in the matter of our sin through the death of Christ as our substitute and in our place and we are brought to agree with God as to who he is and as to what we are and as to this one way that God has appointed.

Do we agree with that? Do we agree with who God says that he is? Do we agree with God as to who he says that we are, that there is none righteous, no not one, that we cannot in any way better ourselves before him, pay for our sin, do anything he could accept or be pleased with? But do we really agree with God? Have we been brought by his Spirit to bow before this one way in which he has appointed to save us and find ourselves all together in agreement concerning the Lord Jesus?

It is to look to a righteousness outside of ourselves, what the Bible calls imputed righteousness. It is to have the righteousness of God in Christ charged to our account which comes to us through his suffering and his death and no other way.

To call upon the name of the Lord is to believe and submit to and confess and defend and promote his doctrine which is the doctrine of Christ, which is the doctrine of grace, which is the gospel of substitution and satisfaction.

I remember hearing a man say one time, a man who I thought knew better, he said, “The Old Testament saints, they didn’t really have an understanding of substitution.”

I thought, it is like the Spirit of God sometimes even when you don’t fully understand something the Spirit of God sounds off those alarm bells, you know? And the next thought that came to my mind was this. Here is Abraham who takes his son at God’s command up on Mount Moriah, builds an altar, seeks to worship God there. That is what he said he was going to do. Seeks to worship God, lays his son Isaac on that altar, draws his hand back with the knife and God stops him and puts in his place that sacrifice and substitute which he had provided, the ram whose horns were caught in the thicket in his place. He died.

And you tell me he didn’t have some understanding of substitution? He couldn’t have worshipped God, he couldn’t have called upon the name of the Lord.

It is to trust the blood and the righteousness of Jesus Christ as everything. Christ crucified plus nothing and minus nothing.

It is to obey his ordinances which represent the same thing. What do we confess in the ordinance of baptism? Our confidence in and our union with the Lord Jesus Christ and what? His death, burial and resurrection.

What do we do when we gather around the Lord's table and receive the elements of bread and wine? We do show the Lord's death until he comes.

It is to seek God through Christ as our prophet and our priest and our as our hope, our king, our all. It is to continually praise and thank God in Christ.

There is a lot that goes on in the name of praise. We are going to have a praise service. Thank God every time the gospel church gathers they have a praise service for Jesus Christ. The psalmist says it like this.

He says:

O give thanks unto the LORD; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD.¹⁶

Like the psalmist says in Psalm 116:

I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people, In the courts of the LORD'S house, in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem. Praise ye the LORD.¹⁷

See, when we hear and when we believe and when we confess Christ as he is revealed in the gospel, we praise the Lord. And to call upon the name of the Lord is to see his glory in the world in all that we do. It is to promote his gospel, the gospel of this crucified Christ. It is to love and to help the people he has redeemed by his precious blood. And here is one of the chief things. It is to continue to.

Everywhere that Abraham went... let me go back and use even a better, I think, illustration.

Do you remember Noah? When he got off that ark after having been delivered through the judgment of God on that ark, don't you imagine he was a pretty busy fellow? He had a lot of things on his plate as we say. The Bible says the first thing he did was build an altar, sacrifice of that precious cargo of the ark, the whole animal kingdom on that ark, but yet nothing was too vital and too precious to withhold what was necessary to worship God.

¹⁶ 1 Chronicles 16:8-10; Psalm 105:1-3.

¹⁷ Psalm 116:17-19.

And so he built an altar, the first thing he did, and offered up sacrifices to the Lord. And he called upon the name of the Lord.

And so here is Abraham. I can just see it in my mind's eye. He is traveling with his family from place to place. They get there. They raise up the tents and everything and here are the natives to the land. They are looking over the top of a hill and what is that fool doing there? Why he is picking up rocks. What is he picking up all those rocks for? He is piling them in a big pile. Oh, my gosh. He has taken a lamb out there and he cut its throat, blood all over everything.

He was confessing before everybody around him the one way, the one way that sin is forgiven, the one way that God is honored, the one way God can be just, the one way which is called the way of righteousness, he is confessing Jesus Christ crucified. He is calling on the name of the Lord.

It is to continue to do so. And it is to identify with all those who do likewise.

Now I will ask you to turn one more time, one more verse, 1 Corinthians chapter one. This is one of those verses that makes us to know also that this is what this is really all about. Even though Abraham did it in the way God prescribed.

You say, "He didn't have the gospel."

Yes, he did. He had it right there in a type and a shadow.

But look down at that second verse of 1 Corinthians chapter one when Paul begins to address the people of God in this letter.

He says, "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called... saints."¹⁸

That is what it says there. The "to be" is in italics, added.

"...called saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."¹⁹

What were they doing? Believing on Christ, trusting him, pleading his blood and righteousness alone, gathering together to hear his gospel, to worship him. Wherever they gathered they were calling on the name of the Lord in every [?].

And this is certainly more than a simple act of fallen flesh, because where men and women call upon the name of the Lord, God has gone before in grace and mercy and his Spirit dwells there.

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:2.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Christ said, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad.”²⁰

When we are brought to see Christ not only in who he is, but in what he has actually done as our Savior and our substitute, when we hear him say in our heart of hearts, “It is finished,”²¹ then we will have seen his day and we will rejoice in it.

Calling on the name of the Lord.

And I will just promise this to you on the basis of this book. If you are calling on the name of the Lord, you shall be saved.

As a matter of fact, if you are calling on the name of the Lord you have been saved and you are being saved and you will be saved.

²⁰ John 8:56.

²¹ John 19:30.