

It's Very Simple

Romans 10:5-15

INTRODUCTION

These are the words of a Roman soldier, written to his parents in the first century A.D.:

The most shocking experience I have had lately was when over 40 of my fellow soldiers denounced our gods to become Christians. They have really caused a stir. There was nothing our priests could do, nothing they could offer them, nothing they could threaten them with that would change their minds. So they were condemned to die to die by freezing.

They were taken by the centurions out to a lake near the city near our encampment. They were stripped of their clothes and marched out to the middle of the frozen lake. Back on shore, the centurions built a fire to warm themselves as they waited and guarded these 40 men, so that they should die and not escape. You remember, Montano, my best friend? He was one of these centurions.

Soon the centurions heard singing:

“Forty men on the ice to die- forty men standing true!”

The night was bitter cold, but the men sang on: “Forty men on the ice to die- forty men standing true.” The centurions put wood on the fire, pulled their cloaks around themselves tighter, as they listened to these men dying from the cold. Every few minutes the men sang out and each time their voices became weaker.

Then, to the amazement of the centurions, the singing changed to “Thirty nine men on the ice to die- thirty nine men standing true.” Out of the darkness the centurions watched as one man came staggering back to give up his Christian faith.

At that second, Montano tore off his clothes and ran out to the ice. Immediately the voices surged, “Forty men on the ice to die- forty men standing true.” Montano died with them that night.

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the Roman Christians in approximately A.D. 57. Nero had been emperor for about three years when the letter was written. During Nero's reign – and especially after the burning of Rome in A.D. 64 – the Roman persecution of Christian intensified. Prior to that it was mostly the Jews who did the persecuting.

For Nero and the rest of the Romans Christianity was seen as a threat to the established order, because it rejected the traditional Roman gods and did not recognize the authority of the emperor. By persecuting Christians, Nero may have been seeking to assert his power and authority over a group that he saw as a potential source of dissent and rebellion. After Rome burned in A.D. 64 Nero tried to convince the Romans that the Christians had started the fire.

The persecution of Christians under Nero was marked by extreme brutality and cruelty, and some of the most horrific methods of execution were reserved for those who refused to renounce their faith.

- Nero preferred to publicly execute those who refused to renounce their faith, either in events he had personally organized, or at regular state-sponsored times.
- At times, Christians were pitted against savage animals, such as dogs, in a gruesome display of violence and bloodshed. At other times, victims were crucified. The Apostle Peter died that way. The Apostle Paul was beheaded.

If you wanted to get on Nero's good side (if he had one), you could always turn in a Christian. Nero would take care of the rest.

So, the early Christians in Rome lived in the reality that every day could be their last.

- Whenever death is nearby – back then and even today – people begin to have questions about eternity. Questions like this one:

If I were to die tonight, can I be certain a home in heaven is waiting for me?

Paul addresses that in our memory verse for this week:

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

Commentators call this “the first Christian creed.” It predates the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed by hundreds of years!

And here’s the foundational truth that accompanies it:

With confidence, you can know your eternal destiny.

The Apostle Paul explains how in this memory verse. There are two, very simple parts.

VERY SIMPLE PART #1: PROFESSING

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

Do you remember what the angels said when they appeared to the shepherds on the night Jesus was born?

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:10)

That was their message. Not only the birth of a baby, but the arrival of a Savior and Lord.

Christos kurios.

That's the Greek for "Christ is Lord."

To call Jesus *kurios* (Lord) is to place him at the highest level of your life.

And that's a smart thing to do, because the reality is that Jesus is indeed Lord of everything whether you profess Him or not. The angels told us that back in Luke 2. And one day, if history plays out as the Bible says it will, everybody else will eventually do it.

At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
(Philippians 2:10-11)

The angels in heaven, the people on earth and the demons in hell will all eventually come to the same place and make the same profession. Christ is Lord.

Even though there is no other Lord, there have always been other people and things vying to topple Jesus from that top spot. Among them were the various Caesars. The competing phrase in Paul's day was:

Caesar kurios

Caesar is lord. That's what the citizens of the Roman empire heard every day.

Residents of the empire were ordered to come to the public square, burn a pinch of incense, and speak the words *Caesar kurios*, "Caesar is lord." If they said it, they could go home. But ...

- Refusal could result in imprisonment, confiscation of property, banishment, and even death.
- Christians, however, did refuse. They confessed a higher allegiance.

NOT Caesar kurios. But Christos kuirios.

The Lordship question is a key question. Because who or whatever is Lord of your life determines what you do with your life. Who is in charge of you?

And even though we stumble and fall, if the deep desire of our heart is to yield to the Lordship of Christ, we have processed part one of this very simple plan.

VERY SIMPLE PART #2: BELIEVING

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and **believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead**, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

Of the all the things we might be asked to believe, why that one? Why not “If you declare with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in your heart that ...

- Jesus fed 5000 men with two fish and five loaves
- Jesus walked on the water
- Jesus healed a blind man and cast out a few demons.

Why that one? Because this one is the one that is about the forgiveness of your sins.

Paul explains it like this in 1 Corinthians 15:

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are

lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. (1 Corinthians 15:17-19)

That last sentence reads like this in another translation:

If all we get out of Christ is a little inspiration for a few short years, we're a pretty sorry lot. (1 Corinthians 15:19, The Message)

You see, the resurrection wasn't just an exclamation point on amazing life. In the resurrection Jesus won the final victory over sin, death and the devil. Those are the three things you and I can never defeat on our own.

- Through the miracle of modern medicine, even sinners can conquer cancer.
- We have gone to the moon!
- We have the technology to do anything we want to do.
- This geeky little guy even managed to win the heart of the cutest cheerleader at Eastbrook High School.

But sin, death and the devil – I can't win that one! But I don't have to. Jesus did.

Every once in a while, you will hear about a football team that wins a big game on their arch rivals' home field, and is so overcome with the emotion of the moment and the enormity of the victory, they dance on the 50 yard line of their opponent. And while coaches always cringe when that happens, you can understand the emotion, right?

Well, back in that 1 Corinthians passage, Paul is so excited about what the resurrection means for you and me that he lets his emotions get away from him and dances on the 50 yard line. Listen:

Oh, Death, who's afraid of you now? It was sin that made death so frightening and law-code guilt that gave sin its leverage, its destructive power. But now in a single victorious

stroke of Life, all three—sin, death and the devil—are gone, the gift of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God! (1 Corinthians 15:55-57, The Message)

That's why it is so important to believe in the resurrection. Notice ... you aren't asked to understand it, just accept by faith that God did it. And because He did it, your sins can be forgiven.

APPLICATION

So here is the memory verse again:

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and **believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead**, you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

In other words, ...

- If you say

I want Jesus to be the Lord of my life.

- If you believe

Jesus alone forgives me of my sins.

- THEN you WILL BE saved. Not might be. Not hope so. WILL BE.

How simple is that?

You can pray that right now.

Amen