

## **“Everyone. Yes, Everyone”**

*Romans Wasn't Read in a Day – part #8*

*Romans 10:5-15*

*Welcome, prayer.*

How many of you love the beaches in Michigan? I do! No salt, no sharks, no tsunamis or hurricanes, and a whole lot of sand and interesting rocks. We are really blessed in this state, and especially here in the U.P.

While I was in college, I spent my first summer in Evanston, Illinois. It was a very hot summer. I was renting an attic room a few blocks from Lake Michigan, and many days I came home from work thinking, “I’d really like to cool off at the beach.” I took a walk to the lake, and I was shocked to discover, if I wanted to go swimming, I’d have to buy an entry ticket. All of the beaches in the area were private beaches. Literally, I had to pay to swim. In the northern suburbs of Chicago, all the lakefront property is private and very expensive. Public access is non-existent. I was used to my hometown on Lake Huron, with multiple city beaches and a huge state park. In Tawas, you could just walk into the water; you didn’t have to pay. Even if you took a whole car load of people, city parks were free, and the state park would let you in with a relatively cheap per-car permit.

It’s summer. We are looking for refreshment. I love that the parks in Houghton and Hancock, like Kestner Park, are free to the public. I admit, I’ve taken it for granted. If I’m hot, I go to the water and get refreshed.

Those of you who have been to large cities might laugh at my naiveté. But it’s not just beaches that are restricted. Did you know, some churches at one time charged a pew tax? That’s right, if you wanted to actually sit down during worship, you had to buy a ticket. In fact, a denomination called the “Free Methodist” formed over that contentious issue. Today pew taxes are a thing of the past, but the exclusionist tendency maybe is not. Last Sunday, a man came up to me after worship and said, “I didn’t think I should go into the sanctuary. I wasn’t dress appropriately.” He was wearing shorts and t-shirt. I was in khakis and a golf shirt. I said, “It doesn’t matter what you wear. All are welcome here.”

I’m not here to rag on churches today, past or present. We are not perfect, and we are trying. However, I do think we are conditioned by our society to

expect exclusivity. We find dress codes required in certain places, some as simple as “No shoes, no shirt, no service,” and others with “black tie only” signs. We expect bouncers at the door of a club. We apply to colleges, not knowing if we’ll get in. We audition for theatre, orchestra, and band. We need visas to visit certain countries. And even if there is no explicit restriction, many times we walk into a place, be it a church or other organization, and one of our first thoughts is, “Am I welcome here? Is everyone?”

So let me make my first point clear: the church is open to all. Period. No matter your background, history, ethnicity, lifestyle or even your religious beliefs, you are welcome here. To be sure, the church is the place where we teach others to worship God. We proclaim the gospel. We are about Christ and his beloved community. That’s one reason we are outdoors today. Someone walking by might want to sit and listen, join us for a moment. I just want to be up front with you. Everyone is welcome here, no matter what.

In the scripture we read a moment ago, the Apostle Paul says, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” That is important, and I want to break it down. So let me ask you all a question: What even is a Christian? In other words, how does somebody become a Christian? (wait for answers)

My goal today is to try to clarify that answer. For instance, a Christian might attend a church, but going to a church does not make you a Christian, any more than going to Taco Bell makes you a 7-layer burrito. Christianity, Paul tells us, is a matter of the mouth and the heart.

A lot of people have heard of John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life.” That’s a good summary of the gospel. Romans 10:9 is another important verse: “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) Paul tells us how to receive the gospel; in a nutshell, this is how one does become a Christian.

There are two important phrases here: “declare with your mouth” and “believe in your heart”. Let me break down the “believe” part first.

Think of all the things you believe. You believe the world is round. You believe water flows downhill. A lot of things we believe can be experienced,

proven in some way. Others are more subjective. I believe the world is good. I believe chocolate is better than vanilla.

The type of belief Paul is talking about here is not something that can be proven, nor is it a matter of opinion. This type of belief is a decision you alone can make. “Believe that God raised Jesus from the dead.” There is a whole lot to that statement. If you believe Jesus rose from the dead, then you believe he lived and died. You believe he was born in Bethlehem to Joseph and Mary, that Jesus was the true Son of God, crucified 2,000 years ago at the hands of his own people and Roman oppressors. You believe that Jesus willingly went to the cross. That type of belief is more like believing the chair you’re currently sitting on will support your body. It’s trusting someone to save you with everything you are. Paul says, you must believe the whole gospel story. And you know this when you believe it in your heart.

In the Bible, the heart isn’t just the organ that pumps your blood. The heart represents the core of your being. Your heart beats faster when you are excited. Your heart is heavy when you are grieving. Your heart is the secret place where only you decide what you believe. In your heart, do you believe in Jesus? Do you really trust him?

Let’s say for a moment that you do trust in Jesus. Paul says, the other step to become a Christian is to “declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord.” Some versions of the Bible use the word “confess.” In other words, publicly, in the presence of witnesses, you say that Jesus is Lord.

A declaration or confession sounds like something a defendant would say in a court of law. Imagine the judge asks you, “Did you commit this crime?” You, of course, say no. But then, at home, in your closet with the door shut, you whisper, “It was me!” Which confession is real? The public one. The same is true of a Christian. When you profess Jesus as Lord, when you call on him as your Savior, you have to do it publicly. A silent confession is really no confession at all.

When Paul was writing these words, this declaration was literally a matter of life and death. The Romans said, “Caesar is Lord.” They persecuted Christians who confessed, “Jesus is Lord.” One could be executed for treason if they publicly followed Jesus.

Today in North America if you, "Jesus is Lord," no one is going to crucify you. Yet, in other ways, it is difficult to be a Christian, because truly surrendering to Christ is counter-cultural. A lot of people want you to whisper "Jesus is Lord" instead of declaring it aloud.

The Bible has an important word for anyone who is undecided on their declaration. In Matthew 10:33, Jesus says, "But everyone who denies me here on earth, I will also deny before my Father in heaven." We can't have it both ways. We have to make a statement and truly believe it.

Confess with your mouth and believe in your heart. Although that is an individual decision, everyone here can encourage others to make that declaration.

Let's say for a moment that you have made that confession. You do believe in your heart that Jesus is the Son of God and that he came to save you. There is one more important point. Do you have beautiful feet? Paul says you do, if you are a messenger of good news. Look at your feet. They are made beautiful when you share the gospel with someone who needs to hear good news.

Simply put, each person needs someone else to share the story of Jesus so that everyone can believe it. You can't believe something you don't know, you can't know something you've never heard, and you can't hear something no one ever told you.

I'm going to close this message by walking through the basic gospel message. It can be summed up in five words: Good news; Jesus loves you. God, our Creator, wants to have a personal relationship with each one of us. Unfortunately, something the Bible calls sin gets in the way of that relationship. Each of us makes decisions every day, and sadly, most of them are selfish. When we reject God's way and choose our own, we experience the consequences of sin. Paul says sin pays out in guilt and death. That's not God's plan for us.

God cannot just ignore our sin. That wouldn't be fair or just. Instead, God says, "My plan is to forgive you by letting my only Son die on a cross. His death will cover your sin. He will trade your guilt for his own righteousness, so that you can be completely justified and return to me."

Every sin you ever committed is nailed to the cross. And because Jesus, the perfect, innocent Lamb of God willingly died to save the world, God raised him

from the grave on the third day, Easter morning, proving that Christ was alive and holds the keys to sin and death. Nothing can stop his love from reaching out to us.

That is the gospel, my friends. That is the good news. But the good news is meaningless without believing and confessing it. Jesus offers you a chance for a brand-new life. Will you receive it? Will you call him Lord, even though it means completely surrendering every part of your life to him?

If you've never heard this before, this is your opportunity to respond. If you have heard the gospel, this is your opportunity to recommit your life to Christ. For all of us, today is another opportunity to share this good news.

Christ is as close as your heartbeat. He is knocking at the door of your heart, and you are the only one who can open the door.

The world needs good news right now. We no longer have to be slaves to sin, death, selfishness and greed. We do not have to be perfect or try to fit in with everyone else. Instead, we can surrender to Christ. This invitation is for everyone.

It's a dangerous declaration when you say, "Jesus is Lord. True Christians live a risky lifestyle. Take this wallet, for example. It's no longer mine. It's truly "Jesus' wallet," and I am just the steward of it. All things Christ has given you are ultimate his, including your life. Will you surrender it all to him, and in return, discover the life you've always wanted in his love?

Please join me in prayer. (End with an altar call.)

*Song – All the People Said Amen*

*Invite to conversation after worship, including teaching about baptism and church membership.*

**Memory Verse:** Romans 10:13

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

**Reflection Questions:**

1. Name some things you need saving from? How hard is it to admit those things?
2. How have you tried to save yourself? What habits and priorities have you tried to improve your life and relationships? How well has that worked?

3. Why does Paul tell us to confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord? What does public confession do for our faith?
4. What thing do you believe in your heart? Why do you believe them?
5. Have you called on the name of Jesus to be saved? Would you, now, today?
6. Have you blessed someone else with good news? Will you tell someone else about the gospel of Jesus Christ?