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The Rock of Offense

Romans 9.30-33

Series: The Pure Gospel

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The Village Church

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I. Introduction

- A. He was driving like his nickname suggests
 - 1. “Mad Mel”
 - 2. He was my college basketball coach
- B. Mel had become a Christian fairly recently
 - 1. His nickname was indicative of his prior life
 - a. He was now a different person
 - b. But nicknames take a while to catch up with spiritual transformation
- C. But his driving hadn’t quite caught up with his spiritual transformation either
 - 1. He was flying around the back roads of Western Pennsylvania like we were on a ride at Disney
 - a. I was holding on to my seat with every turn
- D. I wasn’t the only one holding on
 - 1. As I remember the occasion, there were two or three others in the car
 - 2. The problem was, we were running late
- E. We were trying to get to a church youth group meeting
 - 1. Mel was taking several of us Christian athletes to speak at a little country church in the middle of nowhere, Pennsylvania
 - 2. And the problem was, we were lost
 - 3. And I guess Mel thought that the faster he drove the less lost we would be
 - a. Or at least we would get nowhere faster
- F. Being lost in the coal fields of Western Pennsylvania is not anybody’s idea of a good time
 - 1. And the roads that Mel thought would lead us to the little church kept getting smaller and smaller
 - 2. And of course, this was long before GPS
- G. Finally, Mel realized that we ought to stop and ask for directions
 - 1. Now, of course, men don’t ever stop and ask for directions
 - a. But we were getting more and more desperate
 - 2. Trouble was, there wasn’t much civilization around to be of much help
 - 3. Eventually, we saw a couple of local teenagers walking on the side of the road
 - 4. We stopped
 - a. We asked, “Do you know where such-and-such a church is?”

- H. The one boy answered, “Yep. I know right were it is.”
1. “But,” he continued, “Y’uns...”
 2. That’s right, he said, “Y’uns”
 3. Here’s where I might have to translate
 - a. You Pittsburgh people will know exactly what that means
 - b. But for the rest of you...
 4. Western Pennsylvania is north of the Mason-Dixon line
 - a. And, as I understand it, it’s illegal north of the Mason-Dixon line to use the phrase “Y’all”
 - b. “Y’all” is the second person plural in the south
 - c. But north of the Mason-Dixon line in Western Pennsylvania, they say “Y’uns”
 5. So, the boy said, “Yep. I know right where it is. But y’uns can’t get there from here.”
- I. “Y’uns can’t get there from here.”
1. Now that’s an interesting way of putting it
 - a. Maybe he meant that the little church was just on the other side of the ridge, but that there was no direct route to getting there
 - b. Or maybe he meant that the directions were too complicated for him to even try to tell us
- J. But whatever he meant, what he said implied a condition of logical impossibility
1. “Y’uns can’t get there from here”
 2. Of course, we didn’t take the young man’s assessment literally
 - a. We retraced our route back to some semblance of civilization, reexamined our map, and figured out where we went wrong
 - b. And eventually got to our destination – better late than never!
 - c. But it’s true that there was no easy short cut and we had to get back to a place where we weren’t lost before we could find our way
 3. But the way he expressed it, he basically said, “You’re toast”
 - a. There’s no hope for you people
 - b. You might as well go home!
 - c. Getting there from here is a logical impossibility
- K. Our text this morning has a similar sense
1. Only this time, the destination is not a little country church in the Western Pennsylvania hills
 - a. Or any geographical destination for that matter
 2. The destination is **Righteousness**
 - a. That is, a right standing before God
- L. Two groups of people are involved in the journey
1. One group of people arrive at this destination
 - a. But the other group doesn’t arrive
 2. In fact, that other group would never arrive, no matter how long they tried to get there
 - a. Because the way they were trying to get there would never get them there

- b. It's a completely fruitless enterprise; a total waste of time and effort
 - c. Because, you see, "Y'uns can't get there from here"
 - 3. In order to get to your desired destination, you need to start over
 - a. Completely discard your previous approach
 - 4. And only then do you have the possibility of truly gaining a righteous standing before God
- M. **Romans 9:30–33** (ESV) —
 - 1. 30 What shall we say, then?
 - 2. That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it,
 - 3. that is, a righteousness that is by faith;
 - 4. 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness
 - 5. did not succeed in reaching that law.
 - 6. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith,
 - 7. but as if it were based on works.
 - 8. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,
 - 9. 33 as it is written,
 - 10. "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;
 - 11. and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

II. **Revisiting The Great Reversal**

- A. Remember the Great Reversal?
 - 1. How God completely turned the tables on Israel
 - a. How He scattered them among the Gentiles
 - b. Declared them to no longer be His people
 - 2. And yet, He never gave up on them
 - a. And brought them back
- B. Paul used the story of Hosea to illustrate this great reversal
 - 1. The Hosea Story:
 - 2. God had Hosea marry a woman whom He knew would be unfaithful
 - a. And named their children in remarkable ways
 - 3. The first son was named Jezreel which means "scattered"
 - a. He would illustrate the casting aside of Israel as Israel was unfaithful to the covenant
 - 4. The second child, a little girl, was named Lo-Ruhamah which means "not loved or not pitied"
 - a. This signified how Israel would be cast aside and not loved any longer by God
 - 5. The third child, a son, was Lo-Ammi which means "not my people"
 - a. Israel would no longer be God's chosen people because of their unfaithfulness
- C. And yet, as the story in Hosea unfolds, God demonstrates His unfailing love
 - 1. **Hosea 2:23** (ESV) —
 - a. 23 and I will sow her for myself in the land.
 - b. And I will have mercy on No Mercy,

- c. and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’ ”
 - 2. All three of the children’s names were changed as God promised to redeem rebellious Israel
 - a. Instead of Jezreel being scattered, he will be sown, or planted
 - b. God will have mercy on No Mercy
 - c. God will declare Not My People to be My People
 - D. Now that’s a great reversal!
 - 1. But what’s an even greater reversal is that Paul uses that story, not to apply to the return of Israel to covenant faithfulness
 - a. But to apply to Gentiles
 - 2. Gentiles would not be scattered, but would instead be planted
 - a. Gentiles would be shown mercy
 - b. Gentiles would be declared to be God’s people!
 - E. For Paul, in Romans 9, is talking about the new people of God
 - 1. The church, chosen by God, the object of the mercy and grace of God
 - 2. Made up of both Jews and Gentiles
 - a. Who are all the children of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ
 - 3. **Romans 9:6–8** (ESV) — ... For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, 7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.
 - 4. And recall that Paul makes explicit whom he’s talking about as he identifies the vessels of mercy, prepared beforehand for glory:
 - 5. **Romans 9:24** (ESV) —
 - a. 24 even us whom he has called,
 - b. not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles...
 - F. So now, in our text this morning, Paul explains how this great reversal comes about
 - 1. How the Jewish people who continue in their approach to finding righteousness fail to find it
 - 2. And how the Gentiles end up finding righteousness after all!
 - G. The text is easy to outline
 - 1. It speaks first of the Gentile’s surprising attainment of the righteousness of God
 - 2. Then of Israel’s failure to receive it
 - 3. A summary of the reason for the difference
 - 4. And then finally, what’s at stake in how one approaches this great question
 - H. But first, an observation from the text
- III. **Righteousness**
- A. The key word in this text is the word “righteousness”
 - 1. It is **dikaioisune (Gk)**
 - 2. It occurs four times in our text

- a. Literally, “Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it [righteousness], that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.”
- B. Righteousness in this context refers to a right standing before God
 - 1. And is essentially synonymous with salvation
 - 2. Recall that this righteousness is central to what the gospel is all about
 - a. How in Chapter 1 we learned that humanity by nature suppresses the truth in unrighteousness
 - b. And that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel, and that the righteous shall live by faith
 - 3. **Romans 3:21–22** (ESV) —
 - a. 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law,
 - b. although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—
 - c. 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe...
- C. So what we have in our text is a summation of what we’ve already seen to be the central core of the gospel
 - 1. That in Jesus Christ God has provided a righteousness that we so desperately need
 - a. And of which we have none of our own
 - 2. And by grace through faith, God provides the righteousness of Christ for us who believe
 - a. So that we may be saved
- D. So, with that in mind, let’s see who receives that righteousness and who doesn’t – and why

IV. **The Gentile Surprise**

- A. **Romans 9:30** (ESV) —
 - 1. 30 What shall we say, then?
 - 2. That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it,
 - 3. that is, a righteousness that is by faith...
- B. This is quite a surprise!
 - 1. We learned earlier in Romans about the Gentile’s approach to God
 - a. That Gentiles suppressed the truth in unrighteousness
 - b. That none were righteous
 - c. That none understands the things of God
 - d. That none seeks for God
 - e. That all have become worthless
 - f. That none does good – not even one (**Romans 3.10-12**)
 - 2. We also saw that God let them continue in their sin through a downward spiral
 - a. In which God gave them over to their depravity
 - b. Giving them up to impurity

- c. Giving them up to dishonorable passions
 - d. Giving them up to a debased mind (Romans 1.18-32)
- C. But now, amazingly, they find the righteousness of God
 - 1. The text says they have “attained” it
 - a. Attained – received it gratuitously
 - 2. How did they find it? How did they attain it?
 - a. They attained it by faith
 - b. By believing in Jesus Christ
 - 3. “The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (Romans 3.22)
- D. The downward spiral of sin inevitably leads one to despair of any goodness of our own
 - 1. And when the gospel is presented, and Jesus is shown to be the eternally begotten Son of God
 - a. Sent by the Father to provide the righteousness we so desperately need
 - b. And that He paid the penalty we deserve for our sin
 - 2. We Gentiles come to Him the way the tax collector does in Luke 18: “Have mercy on me, the sinner!”
 - 3. And surprisingly, amazingly – we receive righteousness
 - a. The righteousness of Christ
 - b. By faith

V. The Israel Disappointment

- A. On the other hand, there is Israel
- B. Romans 9:31 (ESV) —
 - 1. 31 but that Israel
 - 2. who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness
 - 3. did not succeed in reaching that law.
- C. This is just as much a surprise as the Gentiles, but in the opposite direction
 - 1. Israel pursued righteousness; they strove to achieve righteousness
 - a. But failed
- D. Remember what we learned about the Jewish approach to righteousness
 - 1. Romans 2:
 - a. Rely on the law
 - b. Boast in God
 - c. Know His will
 - d. Instructed in the law
 - e. Count themselves as guide to the blind, instructor of the foolish
 - f. Having in the law the embodiment of truth
 - 2. And yet, their pursuit of righteousness was doomed to failure
 - a. Because their sinful nature rendered them spiritually impotent
 - b. Bereft of true moral ability
 - 3. So that the more they worked at achieving righteousness, the less they measured up to God’s righteous standards

- E. Boice: The Jews – Paul himself was one – thought they were closer to salvation than the Gentiles, because they were at least trying to keep God’s law. But what they failed to see is that they were still failing. And because they refused to see that, they also failed to see what the law was actually given for: to show that we cannot achieve salvation by our works and to point us to the only way salvation can come, which is through faith in Jesus Christ.
- F. This is something that the Jewish people could have, and indeed should have, known
 - 1. **Isaiah 64:6** (ESV) —
 - a. 6 We have all become like one who is unclean,
 - b. and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.
 - c. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.
 - 2. Our righteous deeds are polluted, corrupt, filthy!
 - a. They best we can do in our most noble human efforts is nothing more than sinful aggravation in the face of the holiness of God
- G. Listen to Isaiah’s own testimony – the testimony of the most righteous Jew of his generation – upon experiencing the holiness of God
 - 1. **Isaiah 6:5** (ESV) —
 - a. 5 And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost;
 - b. for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;
 - c. for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”
- H. Listen to Paul’s own testimony
 - 1. **Philippians 3:4–9** (ESV) —
 - a. 4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.
 - b. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:
 - c. 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;
 - d. 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.
 - e. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
 - f. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ
 - g. 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—
 - 2. Paul’s righteousness is nothing more than rubbish, dung
- I. The point is, the Jew’s pursuit of righteousness by the pursuit of a law has always been destined for failure
 - 1. In other words – “Y’uns can’t get there from here”

- a. You can't achieve the righteousness of God with the vain, sinful attempts of supposed human righteousness – which are nothing more than polluted garments
- 2. That approach is doomed to failure
 - a. Any attempt at self righteousness – whether by Jew or Gentile – is a fool's errand

VI. The Great Question

- A. Sometimes our teachers can be really aggravating
 - 1. And then, over time, we begin to appreciate them
- B. One of the most aggravating teachers in my experience was my 8th grade Geography teacher
 - 1. I was ok with knowing the facts of various countries
 - 2. But toward the end of nearly every lesson, dear Mrs. Menzie would write on the board in bold letters a simple question
 - a. Why?
 - 3. The reason why that was so aggravating to me – at least at that stage in my academic life (which at that stage was nearly non-existent) – was that the “Why?” question is usually much harder to answer than the factual questions
 - a. It made me think harder than I wanted to think
 - 4. Over time, of course, I learned how important it was to answer the “Why?” question
- C. Well, Paul – the consummate teacher – does the same thing here
 - 1. He throws out the “Why?” question
 - 2. Romans 9:31–32 (ESV) —
 - a. 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.
 - b. 32 Why? ...
- D. “Why?”
 - 1. That's the great question, isn't it
 - 2. But you know what?
 - a. This time, the “Why?” question turns out to be pretty simple
 - b. We've already seen it as the gospel has been laid out throughout this great book
- E. Romans 9:31–32 (ESV) —
 - 1. 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.
 - 2. 32 Why?
 - 3. Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works....
- F. It's either righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ
 - 1. Or righteousness by works of the law
 - 2. Galatians 2:16 (ESV) —
 - a. 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ,

- b. so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law,
 - c. **because by works of the law no one will be justified.**
- G. The righteousness of Christ is perfect righteousness
 - 1. It is the righteousness of God
- H. The righteousness of works are filthy
 - 1. Polluted
 - 2. Corrupt
 - 3. Rubbish
- I. Why did Gentiles largely receive this righteousness and the Jews, largely, did not?
 - 1. Because Gentiles received it by faith
 - a. And the Jews pursued it as if they could gain it by works of the law
 - b. But you can't get there from here
 - c. You can't get the righteousness of God by works of the law
 - 2. The only way to receive the righteousness of God is by grace through faith in the only truly righteous one
 - a. Jesus Christ!

VII. **Precious or Perilous?**

- A. So, what's at stake in this grand difference – faith v. works?
- B. **Romans 9:32–33** (ESV) —
 - 1. 32 ... They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,
 - 2. 33 as it is written, “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense;
 - 3. and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”
- C. It seems like such a simple thing, doesn't it?
 - 1. Faith or works?
- D. But it's interesting
 - 1. Paul quotes once again from Isaiah
 - a. This time from two passages
 - b. Isaiah 28.16 and 8.14
 - c. And he combines them
 - 2. “Behold, I am laying in Zion...” (Isaiah 28.16)
 - a. “A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense...” (Isaiah 8.14)
 - 3. But what's interesting is that the first Isaiah text says more, and the observant Jew would have understood the reference
- E. **Isaiah 28:16** (ESV) —
 - 1. 16 therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion,
 - 2. a stone,
 - 3. a tested stone,
 - 4. a precious cornerstone,
 - 5. of a sure foundation:
 - 6. ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’
- F. **Isaiah 8:14** (ESV) —

1. 14 And he will become a sanctuary
 2. and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling
 3. to both houses of Israel,
 4. a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
- G. So, putting them together as Paul does
1. God has laid in Zion a foundation stone
 - a. A tested stone
 - b. A precious cornerstone
 2. Which has become a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense
 - a. To both houses of Israel
- H. That's the choice, isn't it?
1. Jesus Christ
 2. He's the cornerstone
 - a. He's tested
 3. And He's either precious
 - a. Or He's perilous
 4. You either find Him to be the blessed and only source of your eternal salvation
 - a. The delight of your soul
 5. Or you will fall over Him
 - a. Tripping on the stone of stumbling
 - b. Flat on your face
 - c. And He will be your rock of offense
- I. Is Jesus precious to you?
1. Or perilous?
- J. Which approach will you take?
1. Faith in Him alone?
 2. Or trusting in your own corrupt works
 - a. Which, as you know, you can't get there from here
- K. But know this:
1. **Whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. (Romans 9.33)**