

Introduction:

Good morning, brothers and sisters. What a joy to be with you! We are continuing our series called *Share Your Hope*. I hope you have been encouraged over the last three weeks as much as I have. There is one thing that Pastor Ritch has said on more than one occasion that has really grabbed my attention. And I want to echo it once again this morning. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to be a fisher of men. If we are not fishing for men, then we are not demonstrating an essential component of following Jesus.

Over the last two years, we have chosen a theme and a simple call to action. Our desire is to be a church that is missionally faithful and united in mission as we are Following Jesus Together. Two years ago, our theme was Pray the Miracle and we asked you to choose two people who were far from God but close to you. We wanted you to pray fervently for them throughout the year. It was awesome to hear some of your stories of how God saved the people you were praying for. Last year, our theme was Know Their Story. We wanted you to focus on simply taking conversations deeper with unbelievers around you. We wanted you to ask good questions and practice listening and loving them just like Jesus did. Our goal last year as a church was to listen to over 2,000 stories. We tried to keep count by inviting you to drop a ping pong ball into our “story bins” whenever you listened to a new story.

Share Your Hope is our theme this year. It is a call to our church. It is a call for all of us to share the gospel with our friends, family, and neighbors. My desire is that some of us may even venture to share the gospel with people we’ve just met, too! The goal is that every single person who calls Bethany their home will have at least one *Share Your Hope* story that they might be able to tell by the end of 2026. Just like in the previous years, we hope to have resources and support available for you throughout the year. But we can encourage each other by regularly asking, “Where did you Share Your Hope?” or “Who is your one for 2026?”

As we considered how we might best equip the church toward this end, we decided to do a series where we would focus on four essential aspects of the gospel message. The last thing we would want would be for someone to feel unable to share their hope because they didn’t know what to say!

Now, when you consider the message of the gospel in the New Testament, it does come in various “packages.” The order of the message varies. The key aspects of the message are highlighted in slightly different ways. But when you look at all of these examples of gospel proclamation, there are some themes that help us put together faithful models. I like to use something called the 3 Circles. Pastor Ritch likes to use an illustration where the cross is a bridge between cliffs. Another faithful way to present the gospel is to focus on four key parts of the gospel message: God, Sin, Christ, and Response.

In the first week of our series, Pastor Ritch talked about how God *is* the gospel. That is such a freeing truth. It means that whenever you talk to someone about God, you are beginning the

process of gospel proclamation! You don't have to feel guilty that you didn't say everything important in your first conversation.

In our second week, Pastor Josh unpacked the reality of sin, which is the backdrop of the gospel. In other words, the bad news of sin is part of the reason why the good news of the gospel is SOOOO good. Then last week, Pastor Ritch emphasized that while God is the gospel, the issue of first importance according to 1 Corinthians 15 is that God sent His Son to atone for, or die for, our sins. And also that the resurrection of our Lord Jesus means that this atonement was acceptable and sufficient to satisfy the justice of God.

So, we have heard about God, Sin, and Christ. I have been asked to unpack what the Bible says about how a person is supposed to respond to the gospel. Our text is Romans 10:9–10. I love this passage because I have been guided by it so many times—whether I am sharing at Hands of Grace or on college campuses. I am regularly helped by this gem of Scripture.

Read the Bible: Let's read together, but to get context, let's start at verse 5 and read through verse 13.

“For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based upon the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based upon 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 abyss?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”
—Romans 10:5–13

Main Idea:

Here's what you need to know as you begin to fish for men and share your hope this year. Every single person that you talk to will respond to your message. They will either respond appropriately, as God desires them to, or they will respond in rebellion against the King of Heaven. Everyone responds- but only God gives life. As we look at Romans 10:9–10, it will teach us explicitly about how God wants people to respond. But it will also teach us implicitly how to respond when our message is rejected.

Therefore, our main idea for this morning is that when the gospel is proclaimed, it calls for a response from the hearer and demands faithfulness from the messenger.

The Response that the Gospel Calls for:

Life-Transforming Belief

Let's start by thinking about the response that God wants from the hearer. This is the major thrust of the passage, and it is what is very clear and explicit. It is also a response that applies to all people. When the gospel is shared, God wants people to believe in their heart that God has raised Jesus from the dead. He also wants people to confess with their mouths the fact that Jesus is their Lord. And the good news is that God never commands what He has not made possible through grace.

Now, in verse 9, the order is reversed from what we might expect from Paul. In verse 9, Paul emphasizes first a confession with the mouth and secondly a heart belief in the resurrection. The two different orders in verse 9 and then in verse 10 help us be sure that Paul is not talking about two separate events. Otherwise, he couldn't switch the order. Rather, Paul is talking about a concurrent reality with both internal and external aspects to it.

Why does Paul start with confession in verse 9 rather than belief? It isn't like Paul is advocating a work that precedes faith or something like that. His entire argument in Romans 1–8, and even in chapter 10 itself, would collapse if a sort of religious work was being introduced. Rather, Paul wants to emphasize what is experienced from a human perspective when belief takes hold in the heart. Confession is basically the first fruits of life transformation. Confession does not create salvation; it reveals that salvation has already begun. It is something that each of us may get to see with our own eyes this year as we are talking with people about Christ.

Not Lip Service

And also, we should not think that Paul is talking about a kind of belief without repentance. Paul and his original readers would never want us to read Romans 10:9 and envision mere lip service. This is NOT a verse that validates a deathbed prayer where someone who doesn't believe is merely saying words that will provide fire insurance just in case the gospel actually turns out to be true. I'll give you two reasons why we can be certain about this.

First, at this time in the Greco-Roman world, people were expected to confess that Caesar was Lord. This was a sign of loyalty and submission to Caesar that was required of everyone in the empire. It did not matter what your religion or ethnic background or socio-economic status was. There were tons of different kinds of people living in the empire. Rome was fine with that—as long as you were willing to submit to the emperor as your first priority. When Christians started confessing through their baptism that Jesus was Lord, this was a big deal. It was, in effect, saying that Jesus was supreme over all else and that Caesar was NOT. It led to all kinds of suffering and persecution.

It doesn't make sense for someone to make the kind of confession that Paul was describing without the presence of real and sincere belief that is repentant. In this Romans 10:9 confession, Paul is talking about publicly submitting to Jesus as the Lord of our lives. This is a

confession that could well cost many Romans their lives. In fact, it would cost Paul his life a few years following the writing of this letter. How could these people make this kind of confession? It is only because their hearts were filled with a love for a new King who they trusted had taken His throne and would one day welcome them into His Kingdom. This is the essence of real belief.

Secondly, the full biblical scope of revelation doesn't allow for confidence in heartless confessions. Many other passages of Scripture cannot be ignored. Jesus preached that we must repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15). Peter commanded the crowd to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38), and Paul told the Philippian jailer that in order to be saved, he must believe in the Lord Jesus (Acts 16:31). What do these verses, and others like them, all have in common? They highlight either the external or internal response of faith that God wants—or, like our passage this morning, they highlight both.

Not Belief in the Resurrection Alone

Now, someone might ask, "Is Paul teaching here that the resurrection alone is the only doctrine that absolutely must be believed for someone to be saved? Can we toss out the virgin birth or de-emphasize the cross as being necessary truths?" No. We need to remember what Pastor Ritch taught us last week.

One significant purpose of the resurrection was that it was God the Father's way of affirming and confirming everything that Jesus had taught. The logic goes like this: God raised Jesus from the dead. Therefore, everything Jesus taught was true. To embrace the resurrection by faith is therefore also to embrace all of Jesus' teaching and to submit to His commands. There is no embracing Jesus if we leave out His teaching on any topic. We cannot embrace His resurrection and then turn around and reject what He taught about money or sexuality. The resurrection proves that it was ALL true.

So, in summary, how does God want everyone to respond when they hear the gospel? Romans 10:9–10 is describing a response of life-transforming belief. That is key for us this year. Because if this is what God wants, then this is what we should want. We ought to be praying for this, working toward it, and looking for God to accomplish it in the people that we are caring for.

The Faithfulness that God Expects from His Messengers

However, if you take the *Share Your Hope* challenge this year, I am confident that you will run into people who will not respond in repentance to the gospel when you share it. Some will. But many will not. If we pay close attention to Romans 10:9–10, we'll find some helpful instructions for us about how to be faithful messengers when people are not ready to respond humbly to our gospel.

Let's say you knock on someone's door and ask if you can pray with them. In the course of the conversation, you ask permission to share with them the best news that you have ever heard. They are polite and generous, so they allow you to share the gospel with them. You finish, and they kindly thank you for your prayers and for what you shared. They tell you that they are so glad that the Bible and stories about Jesus have been helpful to you, but they just aren't into that sort of thing.

How can you be faithful to the gospel in this moment? I want to give you four faithful paths that you might take that are all based in Romans 10:1–13. We might boil these four options down to four verbs: understand, expose, compare, and hope. Keep in mind, these four paths may take five minutes or a lifetime for you to walk down. Therefore, if you do contact evangelism—where you start a gospel conversation with someone you don't know—please be open to a relationship that lasts as long as necessary.

Four Faithful Paths:

The first path is the path of understanding. Romans 10:13 says, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." If they are unwilling to call out to Jesus, then what are they calling out for? You can be sure that there is something else that is ruling their heart. As Bob Dylan once wisely sang, "You got to serve somebody." If possible, try to discover who or what that is. You might ask, "What are you living for?" or "Who is the most important person in your life?"

How about path number two? Let's look back at Romans 10:1–5. Here, Paul outlines two possible kinds of righteousness that a person might be trying to achieve. Now, people may not use that language—they might not have ever thought about the word "righteousness" at all. But the implication of the whole book of Romans is that, whatever people might want to call it, everyone is seeking righteousness. And they are either seeking it through a type of morality, which is similar to what Paul says is a righteousness that is based on the law, or they are seeking it by trusting God to receive it as a gift. This is what Paul calls a righteousness that is based on faith.

Righteousness that is based on morality or law will push people to do one of two things. It will push them to try to self-improve or to self-atone. These are strategies that people use in order to "be okay," "be their true self," "find inner peace," or whatever other phrase that they might use to describe their inner desire for righteousness.

Your task as a faithful messenger of the gospel is to expose their tactics and call them out for what they really are: hopeless attempts to save themselves. When you do that, you have to be as gentle and wise as possible, because you are touching on stuff that is core to their identity! And we never want to walk this path of exposing someone's heart idols or fruitless tactics for reaching righteousness without being very clear about the superior offer of grace.

The third path of the faithful gospel messenger is the path of comparing. We should work very hard to compare their way of life to the way of grace. This might be the most important path you can take with people, though you might not get there until you have built a good deal of trust. This path is built on the logic of Romans 10:6–8.

“But the righteousness based on 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 abyss?”’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? ‘The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart’ (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim).”

We might apply this passage by helping people see its implications for them. They don’t have to spend their life on self-improvement, because Jesus became a man so that He could share His righteousness with them. They don’t have to spend their life beating themselves up, suffering, and making sacrifices to pay for the wrongs that they have done, because Jesus died on a cross and did all that atoning work already! He died so that their debt could be completely paid and so that they could be fully free from the shame that they feel and hate.

For some of us, God will call you to engage in understanding, exposing, and comparing for a very long time. In this case, we need to remember the fourth path that rises from our path today. It can be a long path. But it is the path of hope.

Romans 10:12-13 says this: “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

I just want us to sit this morning on one of the precious words in verse 13... *everyone*. Everyone includes that uncle who you are estranged from in the family. Everyone includes that neighbor who leaves their dog waste in your yard. Everyone includes the person that you might bump into at the grocery store tomorrow. It includes your friend who you’ve been praying for and have already shared many gospel conversations with. It includes anyone who still has breath in their lungs. It doesn’t mean God owes salvation to everyone—it means He is free to save absolutely anyone. Jesus purchased this authority with His very own blood.

Therefore, you never know when someone will lose faith in their false gods and their self-exalting methods and humbly cry out to Jesus for mercy. It could happen on a person’s deathbed. It could happen in your next conversation. It could happen to anyone, because God gives life and He gives it through the proclamation of His gospel. So, brothers and sisters, take Romans 10:9–10 to heart and keep hoping even as you share your hope this year.

Conclusion:

If we are going to follow Jesus, we must be fishers of men. If we are going to fish for men like Paul, then we must call people to believe the gospel and join us in making the good confession

that Jesus is Lord. We must not expect 100% of our gospel conversations to be successful. Rather, we must be faithful in understanding people's hearts, exposing the lies that they are believing, and comparing these lies to the grace of God. And last but not least... we must never give up hope.