

15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

16 But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"

17 Consequently, faith comes from

hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.

"Faith comes from hearing" – unlike hope, a confident general expectation in God and His goodness, believing faith arises on the basis of what God is heard to say. This is through the word, through spiritual gifts, or impartation of God's truth by preacher, word and Spirit together.

SUMMARY This passage sets out two kinds of righteousness. One is attempting to become right by God by our own efforts, works or religious involvement. The problem is, we never get there! It is inaccessible. The second is very accessible, but we dismiss it because it doesn't require *us* to do anything, but to trust in what *Jesus has done* on our behalf. This is 'being justified', the real righteousness that comes from repenting of sin, believing in Jesus, and being able to say so confidently.

REFLECTION A real, personal relationship with God and the assurance that goes with it, is not something we strive for – it doesn't work that way. The only way we can be completely justified and made right with God, is by hearing the message; allowing faith to rise and believing; and then speaking out and telling others who Jesus is, and what He has done on our behalf.

QUESTION *How easy or difficult is it to let go of all your own efforts and simply trust Christ? Have you prayed a prayer to say you believe what He has done for you, and asked Him into your heart and life? Who have you shared this with?*

PRAYER Lord, like those first disciples we ask, "Increase our faith" but we know you will tell us to put to work the little faith we have.

Help us to learn from Elijah and Peter by keeping our focus on You.

And protect us from a devotion that becomes an attempt to gain merit.

We are so grateful for what You, Jesus, have done for us, and we cannot add to it. Amen.

Psalm 85: 8-13

8 I will listen to what God the Lord says; He promises peace to His people, His faithful servants – but let them not turn to folly.

9 Surely His salvation is near those who fear Him, that His glory may dwell in our land.

10 Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.

11 Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven.

12 The Lord will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest.

13 Righteousness goes before Him and prepares the way for His steps.

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Bible readings for Sunday, August 9, 2020, with explanatory notes

Bible study on the Revised Common Lectionary passages for **August 9**
Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching

Theme: **Faith is learning to see with God's eyes**

1 Kings 19:9-18 – Faith sees God working in hidden ways

Matthew 14:22-33 – Peter learns about stepping out in faith

Romans 10:4-17 – How to find the righteousness that is by faith

And also: Psalm 85:8-13

1 Kings 19:9-18 – Faith sees God working in hidden ways

Elijah encounters God but not in the hurricane, earthquake or fire

8-9 So [Elijah] got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he travelled for forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night.

"Horeb" – the region of Mount Sinai, a long journey south to the desert place where God revealed Himself to Moses, and later gave His laws. Both Moses on the mountain and Jesus in the wilderness, were sustained by God for this length of time.

• **For further study**, see Exodus 3:1, Exodus 19:1-3, Exodus 24:18, Matthew 4:2,11.

And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

"What are you doing here" – asking why Elijah chose to go rather than God having called him, and whether he knew the significance of the place.

10 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and put Your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

"He replied" – indirectly, in terms of the unbelief and opposition he had faced, not the recent miraculous victory.

• **For further study**, read 1 Kings 18:19-40, 19:2-3.

11 The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the

Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake.

12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

"The Lord was not in the wind... earthquake... fire" – Elijah had experienced God in a spectacular way with fire at Carmel. God was showing how He was at work, powerfully through His word, in quiet ways.

13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

14 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and put Your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

"I am the only one left" – Elijah has not yet grasped what God was showing him, about how the power of God had continued working in undramatic ways, not just the confrontation with the Baal worshippers he had been involved in.

15 The Lord said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of

Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram.

16 "Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.

"Go back... and... anoint Hazael... Jehu... and Elisha... as prophet" – God treats Elijah with grace and mercy, overlooking his self-pity, and giving him three important commissions.

17 "Jehu will put to death any who

SUMMARY Elijah's prophetic passion for the Lord has given way to a similarly intense feeling of despondency – and to be fair to him, he is under a death threat from an evil pagan queen who will stop at nothing to destroy him. On the run, he travels deep into Sinai desert, a significant place where he learns that the power of the Lord is not just in big signs but also quiet, steady change.

REFLECTION God is gracious to Elijah, who let one evil woman displace his faith with fear. Like Elijah, we pay too much attention to what we see and feel, and not enough to the unseen work of God bringing change to people's hearts in quiet ways.

QUESTION *Where is God extending His kingdom, in ways which are not obvious?*

Matthew 14:22-33 – Peter learns about stepping out in faith

As he takes his eyes off Jesus and looks at his situation, his faith caves in

22 Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowd.

"Made the disciples... go on ahead" – the word has the meaning of 'compel'. Following the feeding miracle, the crowd wanted to make Jesus king, John 6:15. To prevent the disciples getting caught up in this, Jesus 'compelled' them to find a boat and go.

23-24 After He had dismissed them, He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray. Later that night, He was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

"Distance from land" – about three miles out, half way across the Sea of Galilee, John 6:19, but not making much way into the wind.

25 Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.

"Walking on the lake" – a demonstration of God's sovereignty over stormy waters.

• **For further study,** Job 9:8; Ps. 77:19; Isa. 43:16.

escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu.

18 "Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him."

"I reserve seven thousand" – it felt to Elijah like he was the only believer in Israel. The round number seven thousand signifies completeness – the remnant was enough for God's purposes.

26 When the disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear.

"It's a ghost" – the related OT word meant a dream or vision that was not real. The disciples thought their eyes were deceiving them.

27 But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"It is I" – literally "I AM", the name that God revealed to Moses at the burning bush. Jesus is revealing His divinity.

28 "Lord, if it's You," Peter replied, "tell me to come to You on the water."

29 "Come," He said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus.

"Out of the boat" – note Peter's considerable faith in getting out of the boat.

"Walked on the water" – a physical impossibility. The disciples' lesson is seeing that in the power of Christ, they could do things ordinarily impossible.

30-31 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him.

"You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

32-33 And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshipped Him,

Romans 10:4-17 – How to find the righteousness that is by faith

Trying to be righteous by works and not faith will always fail

4 Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

"Culmination" – telos, end-point or, as here, fulfilment. Christ makes it possible for anyone who believes (see v. 13 below) to be in right standing before God.

5 Moses writes this about the righteousness that is by the law: "The person who does these things will live by them."

The person who does these things... – This, from Leviticus 18:5, is the path toward righteousness. Israel was called to under the Moses covenant, although relationship with God was also by faith, Genesis 15:6. Paul taught earlier that life does not come this way because all violate the law, Romans 1:18-3:20.

6-7 But the righteousness that is by 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 deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

"Do not say in your heart..." – this from Deut. 30:12-14 is about the law; Paul applies three sayings in a fresh way to the Good News. There is no need to go up to heaven to find Christ and be made right by Him, because He has come to earth as man. Nor do we need to go to the place of the dead to find Him, because He has been raised from the dead.

8 But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim:

"The word is near you" – continuing the quote above, Christ is where we are when we simply believe the message. He explains more in succeeding verses, summarised in v.17 below.

9 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.

saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."

"You are the Son of God" – only God could exert mastery over the created order, reminding the disciples of "He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea," Job 9:8.

"Declare... and believe" – not just an acknowledgment that that Jesus is Lord of the universe because even demons believe that, James 2:19. This is the deep and unreserved declaration that Jesus is one's own sovereign. People about to enter the water of baptism would declare this.

10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.

"For" – explaining v.9, the condition for righteousness (being justified), is heart faith, which is internal. The condition for salvation from the power of sin and God's just judgment, is our declaration – an external action.

11 As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in Him will never be put to shame."

"As Scripture says" – Paul quotes from Isaiah, but this is the essence of the New Covenant foretold by Jeremiah.

• **For further study,** read Isaiah 28:16, Jer. 31:33-34, Romans 9:32-33

12-13 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on Him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

"Jew and Gentile" – who have exactly the same access to the Lord by the same means, declared faith.

14 How, then, can they call on the One they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the One of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

"How can they call on" – rhetorical questions in reverse order answer the argument that the Jews were not able to hear and respond to the gospel. The necessary elements are: preachers that are sent, the message proclaimed, the hearing of the message – and (where the Jews fell down) believing it.