

Is God playing hide and seek?

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[0 : 0 0] One of the games that is often played in our home is hide and seek. You know, hide and seek. Everybody's played hide and seek, yes. Our children love searching for each other and searching sometimes for their parents when we hide ourselves.

And sometimes just searching for things, presents and stuff. When we give them, they actually really like it when we hide them first and have to discover them. And over the years, when we've played hide and seek and hid things from our kids, we've observed an interesting phenomenon in how they actually search for things.

Typically, what they'll do is they'll close their eyes and they'll count to 20 or whatever, maybe skip a few numbers, maybe count a little bit too fast. But, you know, they count with their eyes closed, expect them to go.

And then, when they're finished, off they go. Ready or not, here I come. And off they run, looking in every possible place they can, under couches and cupboards, on top of shelves, whatever.

But what I've noticed, which is really interesting, is they tend to search in every room in the house except the one they started in. They always assume, especially if I've hidden something, the thing that they're looking for is in some far away and hard to reach place.

[1 : 1 3] But what I've found is that it's just as effective actually to hide it in plain sight, in the very room that they're in, because that's the one place they're not going to look. Because when they open their eyes, invariably off they go, in searching everywhere else except there.

Now, I want to suggest from the two passages that we've read, Deuteronomy and Romans, that's the same way people in our world tend to look for God, isn't it?

Our tendency as human beings, trying to find our Creator and enter into some kind of relationship with Him, our tendency is to go off looking in the most weird and wonderful places, get caught up in all sorts of complicated religions.

At last count, I think there were 270 religions, different religions in the world. We go off and look everywhere except where God really is, because God is in fact much closer than we ever thought possible.

That's really what these passages are teaching us. And what's more, what we learn here in Romans 10, is that all that kind of religious enthusiasm, our attempts to reach God, actually, that is what takes us further away from God at the end of the day, not closer.

[2 : 2 7] And that's the first point I want us to get from this passage this morning, that religion takes you further away from God, which is a very interesting thing for a pastor up in a pulpit to say, isn't it?

But when I say that, what I mean by religion is how people generally understand it today, how people will talk about religion, which is things you must do to be right with God.

That is, you know, in a nutshell, what religion in our world is. And every religion has its own opinion of who that God is and what He wants. But if you boil them down, they're all the same.

They're people trying to impress God, trying to earn God's favor. That is, in a nutshell, what religion in our world is understood to be. But the problem, says Paul, is the more people try to do this, the further away they get from the true God.

It's a very strange phenomenon. But he goes on to explain why that is. I want you to see. And he does it in the context of comparing the religious Jews of his day, of which he was from, with the comparatively non-religious Gentiles.

[3 : 36] And look with me at verse 30. See what he says. What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it. A righteousness that is by faith.

But the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Okay, so what he's saying, in other words, is that the religious Jews, who were uber-religious, and who searched, and searched for a way to be right with God, and they worked every day at being right with God.

Righteousness, as Paul puts it. That's what we mean here by the word righteousness. Being right with God. Being in right relationship with God. The Jews who searched so adamantly for that didn't find it.

While the Gentiles, who weren't looking for it, did. That's what Paul's saying here. And he goes on to explain it. Look at verse 32. Why not? Why didn't they find it?

Well, here's the answer. Because they pursued it, not by faith, but as if it were by works. And that is the key that we've got to understand.

[4 : 42] You know, that's why the religion of the Jews took them away from God, rather than towards Him, because they tried to get right with God by keeping His law. By works.

Now, we might say, what's so bad about that? You know, good for them. At least they tried something. Well, here's what's wrong with it. Chapter 10, verse 3.

Have a look. I hope you do have your Bibles open in front of you. Because you'll only, you'll get, when I preach, you'll get the most out of a sermon by having your Bibles and following along with me.

So, chapter 10, verse 3. What's wrong with seeking God by obeying His law? Well, listen to what Paul writes. But since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Christ is the culmination of the law, or end of the law, maybe in your translation, so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. Okay, so, the reason why looking for a way to be right with God actually took them away from God is because He already made a way to be right with them.

[5 : 51] And by looking for their own way, they ignored God's way. They couldn't take both ways at once. It was either their way or God's way to be right with them. He already made a way, and they didn't take that.

They thought that they had found another way. You see, and the reason they ignored God's way is because the way God made wasn't through obeying the law.

That wasn't why He gave the Jews His law in the first place. In fact, we learned why He gave His law. Anyone remember last year when we looked back at Romans 3? It tells us exactly why God gave the law to Israel.

If you don't remember, I'll remind you. Romans 3.19 says, Now we know that whatever the law says, it says so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law. Rather, through the law, we become conscious of sin. Remember that? If you remember back to when we looked at that passage, it's a very important passage in Romans because it tells us, and we've got to get this right, if we're going to understand the Bible at all.

[7 : 05] It tells us that God gave us His holy law, those ten commandments that are up there, and the other laws that He gave His people. He gave them to us not to make us right with Him, but rather to show us that we've already fallen short of Him.

So that when Jesus comes and fulfills that law on our behalf, we will then trust and follow Him for salvation. In other words, the law up there is like a mirror, not a face cloth, if you know what I mean.

The law shows us where we're dirty, but it can't wash us clean. It shows us that we need Jesus. And that's what verse 4 means when it says Christ is the culmination or the end or the goal of the law.

It's all the same original word. It doesn't mean that He removed God's requirements of us, but it means that He fulfilled God's requirements for us so that we don't have to keep the law to be right with God.

In fact, we mustn't try keep the law to be right with God because then we'll never appreciate Jesus.

[8 : 17] Makes sense, doesn't it? As long as you think you can somehow be righteous through what you do, you will never get why you need Jesus and why you need to give your life to Him.

And so not only is righteousness through law ineffective in that it can never take us to God, but it is also destructive in that it takes us away from God. You see that? Righteousness through works, through what you do, righteousness through obeying law actually takes you away from God, not closer to Him.

It's very important to understand that. Listen again to how Paul puts it in chapter 9, verse 32, just a few verses back. This is very interesting. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.

As it is written, see I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall and the one who believes in Him will never be put to shame.

Now, what Paul is doing here, he's quoting two Old Testament prophecies and putting them together, which are prophecies that both describe Jesus as a rock, which is both the one prophecy, an obstacle for some people, like a rock on a path, you know, that causes people to stumble.

[9 : 33] I don't know if you go hiking in the mountains and you're, you know, walking along, enjoying the birds, and suddenly, boof, you're flat on your face on the ground because there was a rock in the path that you didn't see. That's kind of the picture. But then, also, there's another prophecy that says he's a rock which is a source of security for other people, those who believe in Him.

And the reason is, the reason that he's both is because he's an obstacle to those who aren't looking for him. Just like when you're walking up in the mountain on a path, you'll trip on a rock when you're not looking for it, when you're looking everywhere else but on the path.

You're not looking for the rock, that's when you'll trip over it. And in the same way, people stumble and fall over Jesus when they're not seeing their need for Him, when they're not actively looking for Him because they don't think they need Him.

But for others, for the people who realize that they do desperately need Him, for them, He's a rock of refuge. He's a cornerstone on which they build their lives because they know how much they desperately need Him.

So let me ask you this morning, which is He for you? Which kind of rock? Is He a rock of stumbling? Does He just get in the way of you living the way you want? Oh, I have to go to church and oh man, He makes life so difficult sometimes.

[10 : 47] You know, I wish I could just live the way I wanted. Do you come to church just because you have to? Or because maybe you were dragged here by a family member? Is Jesus just a rock of stumbling that gets in the way?

Or, is Jesus the foundation on which you build your life? Do you realize that you can't get to God and be righteous and be the person that you are meant to be?

You can't do that apart from Jesus. So much so, you realize that so deeply that you prioritize Jesus and following Him above all other things every day. Which kind of rock is He for you?

Because you know, the only reason that you wouldn't prioritize Jesus, the only reason that you'd put Jesus on the back seat of your life is if you think you can get to God on your own steam.

But you can't. That's the most dangerous thing you can think. Thinking that you're good enough for God. You're not. You're not good enough for God.

[11 : 54] You need Jesus more than you know. A Christian who gets the gospel, if someone came to them and said, are you a good person? Their answer should be, no. No, I'm not. That's why I need Jesus.

That's why I live for Him. That's why I follow Him. And that's really all you've got to realize to be saved. To find righteousness. And that's the irony. People who think they can be righteous can't.

And people who realize they can't, can. That's the glorious irony of the gospel. Because there's a righteousness from God that doesn't come through law, but it comes through faith.

And that's why, secondly, what it implies, what it means, is that anyone can be saved. Anyone can be saved. Not just religious people or good people.

Look from verse 6 onwards. There's some very strange language, but it's very important to grasp. But the righteousness that is by faith says, do not say in your heart who will ascend to heaven, that is to bring Christ down, or who will descend into the deep, that is to bring Christ up from the dead.

[12 : 59] 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. 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.

Now this is quoting from an Old Testament passage from Deuteronomy, the one we read earlier, in which God was explaining to his people Israel that coming to him in relationship is really not as hard as they think.

precisely because he knew the way they would come is through trusting the Messiah, trusting Jesus. And to do that is really not hard.

You don't need to find a way up to heaven. You don't need to work out what to do to make you worthy of heaven. And you don't need a plumb mysterious depths of knowledge to reach God.

You don't need some special guru to give you a secret key to finding God. You don't need to subscribe to a 10-week online video course or whatever it is. And you don't need someone to die and come back and tell you what's on the other side like those books people sell that say, well, we've been to heaven and we can tell you we've come back to life.

[14 : 07] No, you don't need any of that. Why? Because Jesus has already done all of that. Jesus has fulfilled the requirements to get up to heaven so that you don't have to. Jesus has died for sins so that you don't have to.

And Jesus has risen again to give you new life. So that you don't have to do anything more to enter that life to be in a relationship with God.

And in fact, the only one thing that is necessary is not a work that you do at all. It's a recognition that you can't do any work. Which is to call on the name of the Lord.

Verse 13 You should underline that. You should highlight it, whatever. You should memorize that verse because it really is the heart of the gospel message.

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. And what that means is stop what you're doing to try to earn favor with God and call to Him and let Him carry you.

[15 : 13] Call on His name, recognize who He is and what He's done and rely on that alone. You know, that's why a person can't be a follower of Christ and also subscribe to some religion any more than someone in a burning building can call on the firefighter to come rescue them but then go out and try to find their own way out.

No, they've got to do one or the other. See, if a person in a burning building like the person that's on the screen behind me, if they want to be rescued, they need to abandon all thought of saving themselves and they need to make it known that they need rescue and then when that rescue comes, when the firefighters arrive, they need to listen to those rescuers, listen to the instructions so that they come to safety.

They need to listen, they need to abandon all hope of saving themselves and jump as this lady is doing in a fire in the UK and that's what it means to call on the name of the Lord, you see, to believe in your heart that he can save you because he died for your sins and then to make known publicly that you need saving.

You know, this woman wasn't worried about what people would think of her when she stood up there saying, help, help, and yet so many Christians worry what people think of them if they follow Christ.

No, you see, she didn't worry because she knew the danger. She knew that she couldn't save herself and so Christians need to make known publicly, declare with their mouth, Jesus is Lord.

[16 : 46] By being baptized, by taking communion, you know, these aren't religious works but they are public signs that you have called on the name of the Lord. And so you see, you don't need to be religious to be righteous.

In a way, you need to be the opposite. You need to realize that you're helpless. You know who Jesus hung out with during his time on earth? You know the type of people he hung out with?

Prostitutes, corrupt officials, beggars, thieves. And of course, this got criticism from the religious leaders of his day and they criticized him for hanging out with the most seedy people and you know what he replied?

He said, it is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I've not come to call those who think they are righteous but sinners, those who know they aren't.

You know, a well-known saying which is quite true is church is a hospital for sinners not a museum for saints. And what do you need to do to go to hospital?

[17 : 56] What are the entry requirements to being admitted to hospital? Anyone know? Are they difficult? No, you just need to be sick. And in the same way, what you need to do to come to God, the entry requirement is that you need to admit that you are spiritually sick and you need to call upon the doctor and submit yourself to his treatment which you'll do when you realize how sick you are which really isn't difficult to realize if we're honest with ourselves, if we stop covering up our sin and we look at ourselves properly, we look at ourselves in light of God's law, we see how sick we are, we look in that mirror of God's law that can't cure us but it can show us the seriousness of our disease.

When we realize that then we will submit to the treatment of the doctor and anybody can do that, you see. It's not a matter of doing works, it's a matter of realizing what's true. You don't have to be religious, you don't have to have a track record of holiness, you simply need to call upon the name of the Lord.

So have you done that yet? Have you admitted yourself to the hospital for sinners? And I don't mean signed up for membership of a church, I mean come to the doctor and said I need help, I need you to cure me and listened to his treatment, listened to his prescription.

Jesus, following Jesus in the Bible what he says. Have you called upon the name of the Lord? Have you stopped trying to live your own way? Have you admitted your helplessness and have you jumped into his arms and given control of your life over to him?

Have you? Well before we finish, there's one more thing that we need to see in this passage. The third kind of take home point which is that God saves people through his church.

[19 : 43] God saves people through his church. Now don't misunderstand that it doesn't mean that you need to be part of a church to be saved. Although if you're saved you'll want to be part of a church. What I mean by that is that the church on earth is the means by which God brings people to call upon his name.

And the passage explains this from verse 14. Have a look. How then can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one that they have not heard?

And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news. Okay, now the logic is pretty simple here, isn't it?

Anybody can get that. If it's necessary for people to call on the name of the Lord, and that's all that's necessary but it is absolutely necessary, it's still necessary, then how can they do that if they haven't heard of him and what he's done to save them?

And they're not going to hear unless someone comes to them and tells them. And Paul quotes from an Old Testament reference here that shows that God has always planned to make his salvation known through messengers who would be sent all over the world to tell people about Jesus.

[21 : 02] Now who are those messengers today? It's us. It's us sitting here. It's the church. We're the messengers. The church exists to spread the message of salvation in this world.

To tell people about God's way of righteousness so that they don't try to find their own. That's what we're here for. And what that means is that when we come to church as Christians we come not to get right with God.

Not to hear what we need to do this week to make God accept us. No. We come to church to be reminded that he already accepts us to praise and thank him for that and then to take that message out there when we leave to the people who haven't heard it yet that you're going to see tomorrow and the next day and the next day.

And if you're not involved at all in that task you know that great task of this age that the church is called to if you're not involved in that then what are you doing here?

Seriously what are you doing here? Why did you come? Either you're still not saved and you still need to hear and understand and respond to the gospel which I hope you're now in a position to do or you're just coming to tick a box in which case you're also not saved because you're not trusting Jesus to be right with God but you're trusting your own efforts either way you need to call upon the name of the Lord and once you have part of what it means to declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord is to make Jesus known to others you know one of the most sure signs that someone is saved is their desire to see others saved also their desire to share the message of salvation and so if you are saved this morning if you are saved if you've called upon the name of the Lord if you've abandoned all hope to save yourself and trusted in Jesus let me ask you what are you doing to make him known to others you might not be a gifted evangelist

[23 : 09] I get that but how are you using the gifts that you do have to contribute to the mission of your church how are you using the resources God has given you to support gospel work here and overseas how are you praying for the lost are you praying for those you know who need to hear and understand and put their trust in Jesus are you praying for missions missionaries overseas are you praying for our GWC students who are preparing to go all over Africa to carry out this great commission because this is what's happening get on board this is what God is doing in this stage of history join the mission get involved because how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news you know we think we think that beautiful people are the ones who appear on the covers of magazines don't we that's what the world teaches us to think but no in God's eyes the truly beautiful people are the messengers of the gospel beautiful not only to God but to the people whose lives are changed through their message these are the truly beautiful people the missionaries we support you see because the gospel is a very simple message it's an offer of free salvation through Jesus nothing needs to be done except to believe it but it's a message that needs to be taken out there it's a message that needs to be proclaimed it's a message that these people have given up their lives to make known to people who don't know it yet will you join them in prayer in support and will you also in your own life be one of those messengers let's pray heavenly father wow we are just amazed that we don't need to do anything to be right with you except call on the name of the Lord and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved thank you Lord for this promise on which we can base our lives and our trust and our confidence thank you for what

Jesus has done for us Lord help us to just realize what a great thing it is to know you to be filled with joy the joy of knowing you and knowing where we're going when we die and Lord help us not to keep quiet help us to make that known give us the words to say help us to know what our gifts are so that we can use them in the body of the church for your glory and for the extension of your kingdom in Jesus name Amen