

"Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

"Sir, we would see Jesus."

Romans 10 (EHV)

¹³Yes, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." ¹⁴So then, how can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one about whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵And how can they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news of peace, who preach the gospel of good things!"

¹⁶But not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who believed our message?" ¹⁷So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ.



There are some great distances that humans have catalogued:

- The climb from the base camp in Lukla up Mt. Everest, 65 kilometers one way.
- The 3,716 miles across the Atlantic, swum by Ben Decomte in 1998 just before he proposed to his girlfriend.
- The Mponeng gold mine in South Africa, where 4,000 miners travel daily, 2.5 miles deep.
- The annual migration of North American caribou, 2,982 miles.

Terrestrial feet have carried us a great distance, but do you know ...

The Greatest Distance In The Whole World

I. The 18 inches from your ears to your heart.

Those 18 inches are the most difficult in the world. Why? Because only God the Holy Spirit can travel them. Millions hear about Jesus Christ as their only Savior, but only some believe. The rest shake their heads in rejection. Or they nod their heads in seeming approval, only to go their own ways. Their ears have heard, but not their hearts.

They **cannot hear the message because they have become deaf to God's calling**. Ever since the entry of sin into the world, when one man and woman refused to listen to God, people have been distracted by their own sins. Even when God called the man's name in the garden, Adam and Eve went hiding. So the natural knowledge of man and woman was clouded and blurred. Not only do people challenge God's call to repent and believe, they challenge the existence of God. Repeatedly they may hear a word of Christ, but they harden their hearts, just like God's own people did after they saw His plague, His manna, His quail, and His water from the Rock in the desert.

Scripture also testifies that human beings of ourselves know nothing of the mystery of salvation through Christ—that we cannot know it or understand it of ourselves. When Peter confessed his faith in his rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth, calling Him the Christ, the Son of the Living God, Jesus said,

- "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven" (Matt. 16:17).

Consciences can bear witness to God's existence and to God's Law, our thoughts sometimes accusing, sometimes defending us. But our hearts are dull and drab due to our natural state of sin. We can know no more about eternal life in Jesus Christ of our own intuition or feeling than a dead body can know about life.

What about you? Can you say with your heart, "Jesus is my Savior whom God raised from the dead"? Can we say with conviction, "His death counted for me. The Son of God died on the cross so I don't have to. Forgiveness rose from the dead so that I will one day rise, too"? If so, thank the Holy Spirit, because through the Gospel someone was sent to proclaim it to your ears; more than that, through the Gospel the Holy Spirit has carried the message from your head to your heart.

And **it is God's will that His Word should be heard**, and **that man's ears should not be closed** (Psa. 95:8). With this Word the Holy Spirit is present, and opens hearts, so that they are attentive to it, and thus converted alone through the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, whose work alone is conversion of human hearts.

CURE: The Jews forever sought a sign, but Isaiah promised them no such thing. Rather it was by hearing that they were to believe.

And God, by the Word and by the sacrament, moves hearts to believe and conceive faith, just as Paul says, Rom. 10:17: "Faith comes by hearing."

A study from Barna Group recently exposed something a little alarming about the millennial generation, those born roughly between 1980 and 2000. Millennial Christians believe that the best thing that could ever happen to someone is for them to know Jesus (94-97%). Millennials outranked other generations when almost three-quarters say they know how to respond when someone raises questions about faith, that they are gifted at sharing their faith with other people. However, almost half of surveyed millennial Christians also said that it's not good to attempt a sharing of the good news if the person already has a different religion.

Some people look at this study and say, "How can this be? These millennial Christians seem to be saying two different things." Fact. The Christians who were studied are ready, but not willing. They have a hard time overcoming another distance, another distance that only the Holy Spirit helps a person travel, the distance ...

II. From your heart to your mouth.

"Who has believed" really means "few have believed." If beliefs are principles you act upon, or in the Christian's case, principles you stake your life upon, sharing the message is a good test. In Isaiah's time, as Paul quotes him, the people of Israel were not listening to God's warnings.

Isaiah here is also speaking prophetically in the person of the apostles. Their listeners wanted to carve them up and take the Word of Christ out of their mouths. This is not the normal word for "Word," either. It is the word for "utterance," any mention of Jesus must be removed, according to many New Testament audiences. It would take courage to bridge the heart and mouth.

When I was growing up, my parents would say pretty much all of my brothers' names before she could call one of us—"Adam, Nate, Hannah, Jacob ... SETH!" With three brothers and one sister, it was easy to slip the wrong name when talking to us. Sometimes that was a good thing if she was upset. It would bring a little levity to the situation.

There are many names out there people can call upon. Only One offers salvation and hope. Only

One desires to be our servant and the ransom for many. Only One was pinned to a cross. Only One rose again with the purpose of saving many. Only One still lives. The rest are in their graves. Only One is the Way, the truth, and the Life. Only the precious blood of One, Jesus, the Father's Son, purifies us from all sin.

What we are talking about here is confessing our faith. Paul is careful to point out faith, but the words "**everyone who calls on**" point out confession. With a stronger faith, it will pour from your mouth. "*We believe, therefore we speak.*" Every Sunday we confess our faith by pouring a creed from our mouths. Those who believe rightly ... believe that they may call on Him in whom they have believed. Only by faith do our words know the way to our mouths.

How tragic is it, then, when we miss a chance to share this creed (we have memorized!) to someone who hasn't heard it? We get stuck in the worry, fear or doubt of how people will receive it. We worry, fear or doubt that maybe we cannot wield the sword of the Spirit. We worry, fear or doubt that we might get lost in the pages of the Word. We forget that we've memorized more than we realize and that the Spirit gives us the words.

How can we overcome the distance between our hearts and mouths? Go back to the Spirit.

We overcome this distance when we hear more of God's Word.

It's so simple when you think about it. We have this mighty sword, these many pages, and this overwhelming peace to put into someone's life, and we forget to apply it to ourselves.

We get intimidated by the, "**Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved,**" and we suddenly forget that, our own "**faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ.**" Do you doubt, fear, and worry about your words? There is more confidence to gain right here. Then you can go out there. God the Holy Spirit wants to give you courage as if giving you wings, and those wings look like the pages of the Bible. *The Holy Spirit constantly fills the Word and Scripture.* He doesn't need a boost from you; on the contrary.

When distances are great, how wide and long and deep was the love of Christ! He wants to press the cross to our hearts, He who did not drag His feet. He didn't worry or fear or doubt about His own survival. He didn't give up just to apply safety and security for Himself. On His way, Jesus pressed His footprint onto the devil's head, enduring the bruise of that bite, so that the sons and daughters of God could tread on temptations to quit without dashing our foot against a stone. For the stone was rolled away, and the good news is for you to know: He spoke up when you have not; **He forgave when you worried, feared, and doubted;** He has won your soul, from head to sole.

It would be so silly if we get lost on the way between our ears and hearts, our hearts and mouths. Only if we believe we can travel that distance on our own. We cannot. Only the Holy Spirit can. Amen.