

St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA
✠ Presentation of the Augsburg Confession ✠
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Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe

“Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: “The man who does these things will live by them.” 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). But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”

(Romans 10:5-10 NIV)

Wouldn't it be nice if there was an easy button for life? You've probably see the TV commercials for the office supply chain Staples where they claim to be the "Easy Button" for business. They have great service; easy rebates; helpful products. They say going to Staples is just like having a button for your business that makes difficult things easy. Of course we know that an easy button for life or business is just as fictitious as an ink cartridge fairy. But wouldn't it be nice if things in our lives went a little easier, a little smoother?

What if we had something that made our life—especially as Christians—easy? What if there was something that made your faith-life easy? And what if I said you have had this “easy-button” of sorts all along, as long as you've been a Christian?

The apostle Paul in our text for today does not say that life is or will be easy for the Christian. But let's listen to what he does say. Listen to him tell us that **The Gospel Makes it Easy 1) for your heart to believe and 2) for your mouth to confess.**

In the book of Romans, Paul is talking about the Gospel. In fact, that's really the main theme of his letter to the Romans. He wants to talk about the righteousness that is by faith, that comes from God. But in these opening verses of this text, Paul is talking about the law. He writes, **“Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: “The man who does these things will live by them.”** He says that the message of the law is rather simple. If you want to live eternally, do these things, the things of the law. That's the basic content of God's law. Do this, and you will live. Don't do this, or you will die. It's as simple as that. And if you want to know what you are to do, well, that's simple, too.

The words for the next verses in our text come from the book of Deuteronomy. There, Moses is also talking about the law and he says keeping the law is not that complicated. You don't need to go climbing into heaven to find out what God wants or go way across the sea to find it. No, God has told you clearly and plainly what he wants. He wrote his law on your hearts at creation. And he wrote his law on tablets of stone for all Israel to see and hear and speak. God's law was not a mystery. It's as close as your heart and your mouth.

But you see, that presents a problem for people. It presents a problem for people whose hearts and mouths are not exactly the purest of places. Two weeks ago in the Old Testament lesson and

sermon text, the prophet Isaiah saw a vision of the throne of God in heaven and when he saw God he threw himself to the ground and called out, **“Woe to me! I am ruined! I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the king, the Lord Almighty.”** And he was exactly right. While Isaiah may not have used the kind of filthy language that we hear around us today, he knew that his mouth was dirty. And no chewing gum could clean his mouth because his dirty mouth was caused by a heart of sin.

Isaiah wasn't alone here. King David, after he sinned with Bathsheba, called out to God asking him to create in him a pure heart – because his heart was impure. Already at the time of Noah, we read that God looked down and saw that the inclination of the thoughts of mankind's hearts were only evil all the time. Their hearts and their mouths were unclean, sinful.

And this is what they were to use to be righteous before God. They were to love God with their hearts and honor him with their lips. The law was very simple, but they simply couldn't do it. And neither can we. We cannot keep God's law and we cannot make up for the sins that we have done. So it turns out that the law isn't as easy as it looks.

But remember that Paul is talking about the Gospel. He uses the same words that Moses used about the law to personify the righteousness of faith, that is, the gospel. **“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). But what does it say? “The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:”** The law seems easy, but it's impossible to keep because of your sin. The Gospel is easy – because you don't have to do it. You don't have to go to heaven to convince God to come and rescue you from the pit of sin and shame. You don't have to go to the depths of the grave and bring Christ back from the dead. No, the gospel says clearly to you and to me: God sent his one and only son into the world. Jesus Christ willingly became a true human being and lived life on earth perfectly and simply keeping the perfect law of God. But he also took upon himself your sin – he took your dirty heart and mouth and made them his own and suffered and died because of them. Then he rose from the dead, showing that he has conquered death once and for all.

And now receiving the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection is really as easy as the “rain and snow comes down from heaven” As we heard in the first lesson today, God says, **“so is the word that goes out from my mouth. It does not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”** And Paul explains what God wants to do through his word: **“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”** The message of the gospel works faith in our hearts to believe and to receive the free forgiveness that Jesus won for us.

It's that easy. The message of the gospel makes it that easy. We do nothing. God does everything. By faith you are justified, declared 'not guilty' of sin.

But there is another part of the gospel that Paul speaks about in this text. He says that when the heart believes, the mouth also speaks. **“if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.”**The way Paul uses these words makes it clear that faith in the heart is inseparably linked with a confession of the mouth. In another letter (to the Corinthians) Paul wrote that no one can say 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit. That is, you can't confess what you believe unless the Holy Spirit has worked in you the faith to believe. So also, if you have this faith in your heart, you will confess that faith. It's that simple.

But it's not necessarily easy. Just ask the teenager who is confronted by friends about his moral convictions. Ask the employee who is mocked by his coworkers for his honest and diligent ethics. Ask the church member who is asked by a family member why they keep going to a church that is so strict in its doctrine and practice, or why they even care so much about true Bible teaching. Ask the Christian who continues to practice Christianity in a country that is not friendly to the faith. Ask a Lutheran prince in 1530 Augsburg who stood before the Holy Roman Emperor defending the teaching of a heretic and outlaw. No, experience teaches us that confessing the faith we know in our hearts is not always so easy. Instead, ridicule, shame, persecution, or even the threat of death sometimes awaits those who confess the truth of the gospel, the word of faith.

Experience tells us that, but Jesus also told us. He told us in the Gospel for today that confessing him might hurt. It might even put our family life or life itself in jeopardy. You can expect that it's not going to be easy.

So then how can Paul say "**The word is near you; it is in your *mouth* and your heart.**" Does Paul still dare to say that confessing is as easy as believing? Well, Paul is still speaking about the gospel. The gospel makes it easy for our mouths to confess. It is the gospel that prompts Christians to confess the faith with their mouths.

It was the gospel that prompted King David, after the prophet Nathan told him that his sin was taken away, to write in Psalm 51: "**Then I will teach transgressors your ways.**" He had heard the gospel; now he was ready to confess his faith to others.

The apostles Peter and John, who had witnessed the gospel in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection; when their confession was challenged, said, "**We cannot help speaking about we have seen and heard.**"

The dukes and electors of Germany who stood before the emperor 476 years ago understood that. They confessed: "...we offer and present a confession of our pastors' and preachers' teachings *as well as of our faith*, setting forth on the basis of the divine Holy Scripture what and in what manner they preach, teach, believe and give instruction in our lands..."

Was it easy for David, or for Peter and John, or for the princes at Augsburg to confess their faith? It was certainly dangerous – even deadly. But I do think that if you were to ask them, they would say it was easy. Not because there was no pain or struggle, but because the gospel made it easy to confess. They knew the truth of this verse: "**For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.**" These confessors knew that it wasn't their confession that would save them. They knew they were saved by Jesus' blood and righteousness. But it is exactly that – the gospel – that allowed them to stick their necks out, to boldly and confidently speak with their mouths what they believed with their hearts.

Do you want that kind of faith – the kind of faith that sees it as an easy thing to confess Christ (at home, at school, at work, wherever) no matter what the consequences? Do you sort of secretly wish there was something like an easy button for that kind of thing – especially for those situations when it isn't easy to speak up. Well there is no easy button, but we do have the gospel. We have the gospel which is the power of God. We have the gospel that works in our own hearts to believe. We have the gospel that works in our own mouths to confess. And brothers and sisters, it is that same gospel that will go out to those to whom we confess. God grant that we live in this gospel, that it may always rule in our hearts (which believe) and in our mouths (which confess). Amen.