

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Romans – Jesus’ Gospel Sets You Free!

Salvation - from a Human’s-Eye View

Study #17

(Romans 9:30--10:21)

Introduction: The Jews - history’s “*”

The Jewish nation is an historical anomaly. Israel is history’s asterisk.

No other nation can trace its lineage backwards four thousand years to one man. No other nation has held so tenaciously to its heritage. No other nation has lived so consistently a national life, even when separated from its homeland for hundreds of years at a stretch.

You’ll never meet an Amalekite or a Philistine or a Moabite. Yet the Jew survives, a testimony to God’s grace.

In addition, no other people has survived such antagonism as the nation of Israel.

Israel is in the news today, but that’s hardly news - and it’s definitely not new. It is surrounded by hostile nations and is under threat from all directions. From the days of Abraham, anti-Semitism has been the rule, rather than the exception.¹

¹ There were military assaults by hostile kingdoms in the wilderness after the Exodus and constant warfare in the Promised Land. There was Middle Ages persecution and Hitler’s purges to go along with more contemporary signs of anti-Jewish sentiment. Israel has always been a nation besieged.

But she lives on. And she lives because from her beginning, she has been God’s Chosen People. And from her came God’s chosen MAN, the Lord Jesus Christ.

While all of this is true, as we began to see last Sunday (Romans 9), the Jews present us with a problem. Yes, they are God’s Chosen People. But they have, for the most part, rejected God’s chosen MAN. The Jew has not enjoyed the benefits of the salvation Jesus offers.

This is the problem the Apostle Paul deals with in Romans, chapters 9-11. What about the Jews?

In chapter 9, we found that part of the answer to that question lies in God’s sovereign choice. He is not obligated to show mercy to anyone, but He does deal mercifully with some.

This morning, we will explore the second part of the answer Paul gives to the Jewish problem, as he now considers the role of human responsibility in the matter of salvation.

Beginning where we left off last week, we find two different ways people have, throughout history, sought eternal life from God. They were the paths pursued in the first century and they are the paths people pursue today.

First, consider the approach taken by the Gentiles who were flooding into the church in Paul’s day.

Dueling Salvation Plans (9:30--10:13)

The Way the Gentiles Actually Attained Salvation (9:30)

[30] What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith

Oops. I just misspoke.

It isn't correct to say that the Gentiles actively pursued God or the salvation He had to offer. They didn't pursue God's righteousness at all.²

When the Gospel message came to them - by *Jewish* missionaries, no less - the Gentiles were minding their own business, worshipping false gods. But when they heard the message, they received it for the good news it was. They believed it.

Even though they were not actively seeking salvation, they attained it. Why? Because they traveled the road of faith.

When anyone puts his or her faith in the Lord Jesus, trusting Him for eternal life, they are saved. When we admit that we can't earn God's favor and accept salvation as a free gift with no strings attached, God says, "*Welcome to My family!*"

That's how the Gentiles got in. And what about the Jews?

Well, the path the Jews followed when it came to attaining a right standing before God is one that is guaranteed to fail.

The Way the Jews DID NOT Attain Salvation (9:31--10:5)

ISRAEL - lost in the weeds of the Law (vv. 31-33)

[31] but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at that law. [32] Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as though it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone, [33] just as it is written,

"BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

Israel sought justification by the Law (vv. 31-32a)

They followed after a system of Law, hoping that by obeying Law they would be justified before God.

Now, the "*pursuit of the Law*" is not bad in and of itself. It is a good thing to do good.

But, the Law was never given as a way to get saved.

The Law revealed the moral standards of God. If regulated society. It highlighted the reality of sin (in that nobody ever totally obeyed it).

But know for certain that God never intended the Law as a way to get to Heaven - and yet that is exactly how the Jews were using it.

Israel had failed to come to grips with the purpose of the Law which was to drive them to a humble recognition of need and to trust in God's gracious provision through the sacrifices.

Since they failed to recognize the true purpose of the Law, they also failed to recognize the fulfillment of the Law when Jesus arrived.

Israel stumbled over the stumbling-block (vv. 32b-33)

Or, as Paul says here, they "*stumbled over the stumbling stone.*"

God will prove Himself to be a solid rock for everyone who builds his life on a foundation of faith. We who trust in God will not be ultimately disappointed.³

But, those who do not trust Him, but put their confidence in another power or in other sources or in themselves will be swept away. They'll be crushed by this Rock. For them, far from being a place of refuge, this Rock will prove disastrous.

So, the Lord Jesus is both a precious corner stone to those who believe in Him AND He is a crushing avalanche to those who reject Him.

Now, this is hard. Paul is saying that those Jews who reject the way of faith and therefore reject Jesus are rejected by God. They are lost.

² When Paul says that they didn't pursue righteousness, he doesn't mean that they never sought after morality. He is just saying that they didn't give much thought to striving after a righteous standing before a holy God.

³ The Hebrew text quoted in the last phrase of verse 33 reads, "*He who believes in Him will not be in haste*" (Isaiah 28:16). There, the sense is that the man who stands on God's foundation will keep his head when all about him are losing theirs.

So recall the opening words of chapter 9. They reflected Paul's heartfelt longing for the Jews' conversion to Christ. Listen to the beginning of chapter 10 and you'll hear the same passionate longing.

PAUL - prayerful for the Jews to be found (v. 1)

[1] Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.

Because his fellow countrymen were in such a desperate situation, there was little Paul could do for them except pray. So, he prayed fervently for his fellow Jews' salvation.

Last week we focused on God's sovereignty. Paul taught us that if God doesn't take a first step toward an individual, that individual will never take a step toward God.

Well, Paul is certainly not contradicting himself here, but held in tension against the truth of God's sovereignty is the truth of the responsibility of man.

And among the things that we who know the Lord can do to influence someone toward the Lord Jesus is to pray. Paul believed that his prayers were used by God to bring those he loved to faith in Christ.

And so you and I also pray for those we know and love who do not know our Jesus. We believe that God hears and honors those prayers.

Listen as Paul continues to speak of his deep love for his fellow Jews and of a longing for their salvation.

THE JEWS - their zealous, misguided efforts (vv. 2-3)

The Jews' zeal for God doesn't square with the facts

[2] For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.

It is true, you know. Orthodox Judaism - then and now - puts much of Christianity to shame when it comes to serious zeal.

And when Paul wrote about Jewish zeal, he knew what he was talking about. I mean, who could compete with Paul when it came to zeal?

In Galatians, Paul said that he used to ***[1:13] persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it; [14] and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more EXTREMELY ZEALOUS for my ancestral traditions.***

Then, over in Philippians there is more. He tells us that he was ***[3:5] circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; [6] as to ZEAL, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.***

But, zeal - and zeal for God is certainly a good thing - can become toxic. Zeal can easily be co-opted by the enemy. Zeal can take anyone in dangerous directions.⁴

The Jewish approach to religion dictated that by ***“doing well”*** they were putting God in their debt. He now owed them salvation.

The ultimate tragedy of following this particular road to salvation was that they missed the road God actually built (faith!), and rejected the only true path to relationship with God there is.

They reject the righteousness of God

[3] For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.⁵

Don't miss the terrible irony. Zealous for God - and rejected by God; sincere - but sincerely wrong.

⁴ I highly recommend a book recently written by an Evangelical Free Church pastor, Larry Osborne, Accidental Pharisees. An excellent warning to those who are zealous for God against the problems that can arise, due to zeal.

⁵ In the Greek, the tense of the verb in the phrase, ***“they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God,”*** (aorist) indicates an historical event, the rejection of Jesus by delivering Him up to the Romans for crucifixion.

The Jews saw, but they didn't perceive. They heard, but they didn't understand. Theirs was an obstinate ignorance.

They wanted to be known as righteous, in and of themselves. But no one can ever be righteous, in and of himself. There is only way to become righteous.

JESUS - salvation's final word (v. 4)

[4] For Christ is the end⁶ of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Remember, the point of this extended section is to show God's plan for Israel. The Mosaic Law had obviously been an integral part of that plan through the ages. Here, Paul is saying that the Lord Jesus is the goal toward which the Law had always been aimed.

What a shame. Israel - Israel, of all peoples! - missed the point of the Mosaic Law.

Through Christ, righteousness is available to everyone who believes. NOT to everyone who tries (and fails) to obey.

MOSES - absolute perfection the only other option (v. 5)

[5] For Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness.⁷

People who approach God on the basis of their own good works believe that God has some sort of cosmic scale on which He weighs out our goodness against our badness.

If the good is weightier than the bad, then we get to go to Heaven when we die.

⁶ Greek word for "end" is telos, a word with a remarkably wide range of meaning. Here it no doubt means "achievement" or "final goal."

⁷ The sense, as Paul takes the thought from Leviticus 18:5, is that whoever practices the righteousness found in the law, shall, on the basis of that righteousness, live eternally. It is not exactly the point Moses was making, but he can legitimately use the verse to suit his purposes here by giving it eternal implications.

But you will notice that Paul doesn't say anything about "*generally practicing the Law*", or "*for the most part*" being righteous. The standard is perfection for those who would come to God on the basis of works.

And who is it who practices the righteousness found in the Law perfectly, 100%, no exceptions, no stumbles, and no failures? Nobody.⁸

No one has ever succeeded in gaining eternal life this way, and no one ever will. Such an attempt is a hopeless quest, a fool's errand.⁹

So, God doesn't keep a "good vs. evil" book. He has an entirely different way of balancing out the debit column in our moral ledger. Righteousness comes only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The problem was never that the Jews took the Law too seriously. They (and us!) failed to take the Law of God seriously enough.

Being sinners, no one can ever satisfy God's standards. So the only means possible for attaining eternal life has to be the trusting acceptance of a free gift of grace.

So here's Paul's thought on the matter. Attaining God's salvation is not hard. Providing salvation for us required Jesus' death and resurrection from the dead. THAT was hard.

But for you and me to be saved is not hard. It's not a reach. It's not difficult.

⁸ Is Paul arguing here that Moses taught that a person could be righteous before God on the basis of obedience to the Law? No. (See Romans 5:20)

⁹ Even if Paul could describe his own earlier career in Judaism as "respecting the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless" - which he did - he knew that it was blamelessness only in the sight of men, not before God.

Salvation ALWAYS Attained by Faith (vv. 6-13)

The righteousness based on faith... (vv. 6-7)

...IS NOT inaccessible (vv. 6-7)

[6] But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows, “DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, ‘WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?’ (that is, to bring Christ down)”¹⁰ [7] or ‘WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).¹¹

We don’t have to climb Olympus or Everest to procure salvation; we don’t have to descend into the depths of the sea or climb down into the Grand Canyon. Jesus has already done all the ascending and descending for us!

There is no point in charging up to Heaven to bring Christ down, because He came down at the Incarnation. Christmas changed everything.

And, there is no use in descending into the place of the dead to bring Christ up from the dead, since He has already been raised. Easter changed everything else.

...IS completely accessible (v. 8)

[8] But what does it say? “THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, in your mouth and in your heart” -- that is, the word of faith which we are preaching

No, it’s not hard to believe. The work of Christ - His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead - makes eternal life completely accessible to people like you and me.

So, just how “near to us” is eternal life? It’s THIS near.

¹⁰ Significant that Paul finds justification for a righteousness based on faith in the book of Deuteronomy, 30:12. Deuteronomy is speaking about the Law.

¹¹ These are Old Testament quotes from Moses, warning against a lack of faith because of the perception that the Law is impossible to follow because it is inaccessible.

How “near” is eternal life? REAL near! (vv. 8-10)

Confess that “Jesus is Lord”

[9] that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord¹²...

The first part of the message Paul preaches is that we must confess with our mouth Jesus’ Lordship.

This is the shortest and the oldest and still accurate creed of the Christian church: Jesus is Lord.

What is being required here is a recognition of who Jesus is. He is the Lord. But, what does this confession mean: **“Jesus is Lord”**?

Well, the Greek word that we translate **“Lord”** here is used in a variety of ways in both the New and Old Testaments.¹³

It can carry the sense of respect, as in **“Sir”** or **“Mister.”**

But in Paul’s day the word also referred to the Roman Emperors. AND, it was the title reserved for the Greek gods.

It was the term used most often to refer to the long-awaited Jewish Messiah. It was even the normal translation of the peculiar Hebrew name for God, the tetragrammaton, YHWH/Yahweh.¹⁴

In the fullest sense, to call Jesus “Lord” is to call Him God. It is to say that He is co-equal with the Father in glory, ontologically *one* with the other two members of the Trinity, eternal, majestic, holy, and omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient.

¹² “Paul’s statement is misunderstood when it is made to support the claim that one cannot be saved unless he or she makes Jesus the lord of his or her life by a personal commitment. Such a commitment is very important, obviously; however, in this passage Paul is speaking about the objective lordship of Christ, which is the cornerstone for faith, something without which no one could be saved.” So Harrison, commentary, p. 112. Also, Charles Ryrie in So Great Salvation and Balancing the Christian Life.

¹³ In the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint (LXX).

¹⁴ Translated this way some six thousand times in the Septuagint.

Certainly that is who Paul knew Jesus to be. That is who we know Jesus to be.¹⁵

In Matthew 16, Jesus asked His disciples, “*Who do you say that I am?*”

And after having followed Him for nearly two years, and having seen Him perform countless miracles, having heard Him speak as no one had ever spoken, having watched Him interact lovingly with people from all kinds of backgrounds, and having seen Him relate to God on an intimate level, Simon Peter answered, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.*”

Peter got it right! He knew and confessed Jesus to be the Lord. And Paul says here that being a Christian involves making a declaration about who we take Jesus to be.

But here’s something for us to think about...

Suppose you are sharing your faith with a friend who has zero background in biblical religion and has never heard of the Trinity. She knows who the Jews are but has never heard of their ancient hopes for a Messiah. Your friend hasn’t been through any sort of study about who Jesus is. He doesn’t know much about Jesus’ miracles and has never heard or heard about His teachings.

But, your friend does understand that he is a sinner in need of grace from God. And you’ve told him that Jesus offers eternal life to all who trust Him for forgiveness. So your friend, based on what you have told him about Jesus, places his trust in Jesus for eternal life.

At this point he doesn’t know that Jesus is co-equal in power and glory with the Father. He’s never thought about it! But he does believe that Jesus has the sort of authority that someone would have to have to make an offer (and to make good on that offer) to provide eternal salvation.

He understands that Jesus is Lord.

My understanding of what Paul is saying here is that your friend is saved. The requirement for receiving the gift of eternal life from Jesus is believing that He is the kind of lord/Lord who can legitimately offer forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

All the rest of our understanding of Jesus’ Lordship is true. He is the Messiah! He is God! And let’s trust the Holy Spirit to lead him into that truth! But the faith in Jesus that saves is the faith that says, “*Jesus is lordly enough to provide me salvation from my sins!*”

This is waaaay different from what the Jews of Jesus’ and Paul’s day had been saying about Him. They said He was a drunkard and a liar and a false prophet.

At one point they even said that He was possessed by a demon!

What do people of our own day say about Jesus? That He was deluded? That he was a great moral teacher? An important historical figure? A prophet sent from God?

In order to be saved, a person’s fundamental conviction about who Jesus IS must change. We must be willing to affirm, “*Christ is Lord!*”

That is what we confess. And what must we believe?

Believe that Jesus LIVES

[9b] that if you...believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved

The Christian believes not only that Jesus lived, but that He lives. He must not only believe in the sacrifice of Christ, but in the conquest of Christ. She doesn’t trust in Christ, the martyr, but in Christ the victor.

The belief that God raised Jesus from the dead is the distinctive belief of all Christians everywhere. In fact, the resurrection is the final seal that Jesus is the Lord!

¹⁵ In Philippians 2:10, Paul says that God has bestowed on Jesus the Name which is above every other Name. I am of a mind that “*the Name*” which is above every name, which belongs to Jesus, is Yahweh.

So, when any person recognizes the Lordship of Jesus AND believes in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (which of course assumes a belief in the sin-bearing work of Jesus of the cross) they are saved.

Age doesn't matter, gender is irrelevant, and social standing is a non-issue. As Paul goes on to say...

ALL are welcomed through faith in Jesus (vv. 11-13)

[11] For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." [12] For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call upon Him; [13] for WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED.¹⁶

ANYONE, without exception and without distinction, who believes in Jesus receives God grace, is forgiven their sin, is adopted into God's family, is justified and reconciled and is saved!

Earlier in Romans (3:22), this comment - "*Jew or Greek/Gentile*" had a sobering effect, because the thought was that both Jews and Gentiles were condemned before God because of their sin.

But here, Paul's point is that the promise of salvation applies equally to Gentiles and Jews who believe in Jesus.

No longer are the Jews singled out for blessings as they were in ancient times. Now the offer is to ALL, an ALL that still includes the Jews!

But so few are taking advantage of the Gospel. Not many Jews are hopping on the "*believe in Jesus*" bandwagon. Why?

From a human perspective, two things have to be in place for someone - anyone, Jew or Gentile, male or female, young or old, rich or poor - to come to faith.

¹⁶ Another way to refer to "believing" in Jesus is introduced here, too. It is that we "call on the Name of Jesus."

First, there has to be a willing speaker with an open heart and an open mouth. Or as Paul says it, someone with beautiful feet.

Conditions for Conversion (vv. 14-21)¹⁷

Beautiful Feet/Open Mouths (vv. 14-15)

[14] How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? [15] How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS."

People don't generally come to faith in Christ in a vacuum. Usually, there is a relational context in which people are saved.

And faith (at least, normally) grows in a heart when someONE shares the Good News of Jesus with them.

Paul says that those who walk toward their friends with such wonderful news have the most beautiful feet in the world!

Paul's words (v. 15) are a quote from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah who was speaking of the Jews who came from Babylon to Jerusalem to announce that the days of exile were over, and that the refugees there were finally free to return to Israel.

Shortly after our son and daughter-in-law arrived in New Zealand in September for their year of adventuring, they went off the radar for a while. We didn't hear from them for a couple of weeks, knowing only that they were hiking among glaciers and rock climbing in remote areas on a large land mass way out in the Tasman Sea. When they finally contacted us, it was really good news!

Last week I got some really good news from a close friend about an upcoming project.

¹⁷ It is agreed among commentators that what follows is one of the most difficult and obscure passages in the letter to the Romans. Frankly, I don't pay much attention to that kind of comment anymore. Virtually every passage in Romans is identified by someone as "the most difficult" passage in the book. ☺

As a church we have recently heard good news about some of our friends finding hope for health after days of concern about serious illness.

The bigger the news, the more we rejoice!

On Wednesday evening I had the privilege of speaking to the kids at AWANA. I told them that when Heaven gets the news that someone has turned to faith in Jesus, a party breaks out!

Then I told them something else, and this something else is what I think Romans 10 has to say to us, today.

I told those children that all of them who knew Jesus had friends who do not know Jesus. And the best gift they could give to those friends is to tell them about Jesus. Sharing the good news about the Lord Jesus is the best news you could possibly bring to your friends. And when you walk, drive, call, email, text, or twitter your friends about Jesus, your feet are becoming really beautiful!

So, what point is Paul making from all of this as it relates to his discussion about why the Jews have not responded to the Gospel?

If nobody told them, well of course, they don't believe! How could they believe if nobody ever shared the good news.

But that - the lack of beautiful feet - was not the problem.

They had heard. In addition to open mouths and beautiful feet, for someone to be saved there must be a receptive heart and open ears. And that was NOT in place for Paul's beloved countrymen.

Open Ears/Receptive Hearers (vv. 16-21)

[16] However, they did not all heed the Good news; for Isaiah says, "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?" [17] So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.

[18] But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have;

"THEIR VOICE HAS GONE OUT INTO ALL THE EARTH,¹⁸ AND THEIR WORDS TO THE ENDS OF THE WORLD."

[19] But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? First, Moses says,

"I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION,¹⁹

BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU."

[20] And Isaiah is very bold and says,

"I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME,

*I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME."*²⁰

[21] But as for Israel He says, "ALL THE DAY LONG I HAVE STRETCHED OUT MY HANDS TO A DISOBEDIENT AND OBSTINATE PEOPLE."²¹

The problem for all who hear and do not believe - Jews and non-Jews alike - is not the lack of a messenger. The problem is lack of receptivity.

There's no problem with the message. The message of Jesus is the power of God for salvation! (Romans 1:16)

Now, could the speaker done a better job. Sure. Whenever I share the Gospel I always wish I could be more articulate, express myself better, unleash the Gospel's power through my presentation with more force.

¹⁸ Quoting Psalm 19:4, Paul is making the point that the Gospel is spreading. Not that Paul believed that the Great Commission had been fulfilled! In Romans 16 he mentions a planned trip to Spain to proclaim the Gospel in areas that had never been reached. The thing is that the message had been publicly proclaimed in the world at large. The Jews had ample opportunity to call upon the name of the Lord, and were therefore without excuse.

¹⁹ God was provoked to jealousy by Israel when they sought a "no-god" in the form of idolatry. He will provoke them to jealousy by seeking out a "no-people."

²⁰ God was found, writes Isaiah, by people who weren't even interested in Him. What a manifestation of grace: that the grace of God is seen in the bestowal of what was not even asked for or sought by the Gentiles.

²¹ In the final frame, God's loving arms are spread open to Israel. Israel's rejection is contrasted with the constancy and intensity of God's grace.

But if the Gospel message is clear, rejection is not the fault of the speaker.

The problem for the Jews was simple unwillingness to believe. And the problem for many people with whom you share your Jesus will be the same.

It may come across as, "*I can't believe*" or "*I won't believe*" but the end is the same. Unbelief. And it's not your fault.

I have entitled this whole sermon series on Romans, *Jesus' Gospel Sets You Free*. Jesus sets us free FROM God's condemnation, our own self-destructive lifestyle patterns, and a life of futility, and INTO a life rich with meaning and joy.

But, tragically, it is not until someone hungers for the freedom that Jesus will give them will they see that the Gospel is exactly what they need.

So, what can we do? These are people we love! We are heart-broken that they are far from God. We have shared the Good News with them. We'd give our eye teeth to see them believe and be saved.

Is there nothing we can do? Yes, there is.

And Paul has already pointed the way for us. We can pray.

Let us pray.