

## 11<sup>th</sup> October 2020 10 am How did you hear about Jesus?

Service led by Phil Sowards, Talk by Michelle Harris

*This transcript is only of the reading, the note about the Bible Project, the talk and the prayerful response.*

### **Reading: Romans 10:8-15**

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: 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. 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. 11 As Scripture says, ‘Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.’ 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

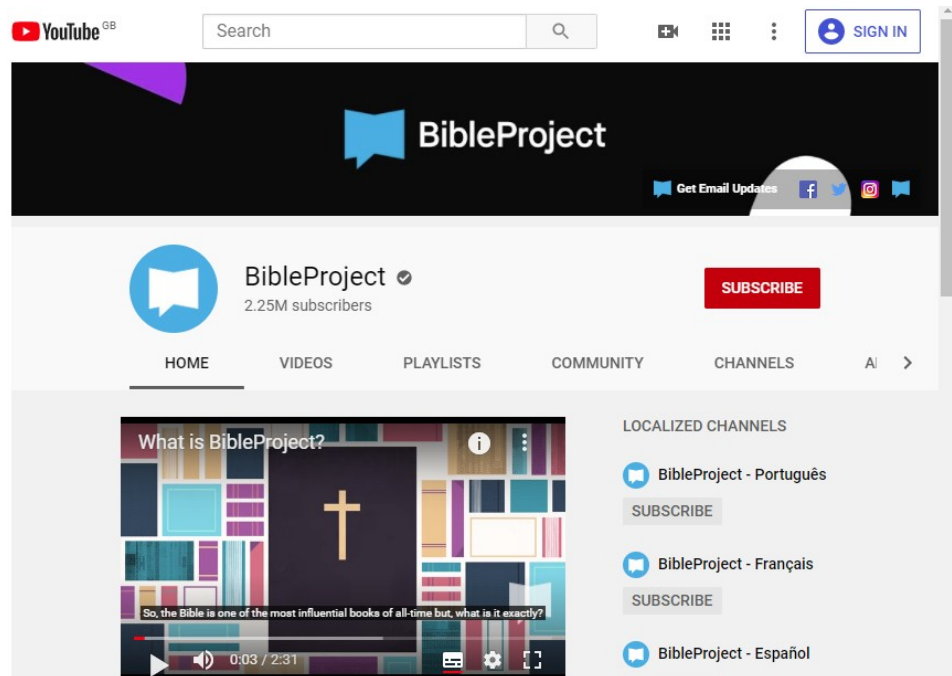
14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

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!’

### **Plug for The Bible Project**

Very quickly before Michelle goes into her talk, I wanted to just plug something which you can find on YouTube, some great resources on YouTube. And I just want to give a plug for this, which is called the Bible Project. If you go in to YouTube and type in the Bible Project<sup>1</sup> you'll come to that sort of screen:

Great resources there for everybody, and irrespective of your life with Christ and your experience of church. If you want to go into depth in some aspects of the Bible, you can do that. If you just want a little snapshot of each book of the Bible, they're very useful: they give you a sort of five-minute sketch - literally a sketch of each book - because while there's a voiceover, somebody is drawing a sketch and they fast forward it, so it appears as though someone's writing quickly, and it takes about five minutes. So if you want to want to do that, the guy who runs Bible Project, you can also find his videos on YouTube, a guy called Tim Mackie<sup>2</sup>, he went from skateboarder to university professor in biblical studies in about 14 years - an amazing story. But I thoroughly recommend the Bible Project, so check that out some time and have a look.



1 <https://www.youtube.com/user/jointhebibleproject>

2 Tim Mackie archives: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeqnFRVfjy5R5ZUR92IZlpg>

## Talk

Now, Michelle, are you still in church?

[Michelle Harris:] I am, yes.

[Phil:] Right. So let's say let me pray for you before we go any further, Michelle.

Thank You, Father God, we thank You for Michelle, we thank You for her heart for the Gospel, we thank You for her heart for young people. And we thank You for her adaptability and her faithfulness in You, so we ask You to bless her as she speaks to us now. In your loving Name. Amen.

[Michelle:]

Amen. Thank you, Phil. And, yeah, I want to completely agree with Phil about the Bible Project: it's an amazing resource. We use it in youth quite a lot. When we're doing overviews of different books of the Bible, they are absolutely brilliant. In fact, when we've been doing our Wednesday Bible studies, I've been using them for an overview of Galatians or different topics that we've been covering within that. So I highly, highly recommend and agree with Phil.

Hopefully you'll have a pen and paper there with you, we've had a habit of getting you to bring a pen and paper with you. If you have got one I'd like you to write down on a piece of paper the answer to a question for me. When was the first time that you heard about Jesus, and it resonated within you? And who was it who shared it with you? I don't know about your story, or how you came to Jesus. I can tell you a little bit about my story. I was brought up going to church, I went to a Church of England primary school in Coventry and then I went to Church of England secondary school as well. I went to all the Sunday Schools of the church. I went to church holiday clubs, and I even helped to run the holiday clubs as a younger teenager, and I went to youth weekends away. I would have heard about Jesus, about who He was, about what He did, and all of the stories in the Bible and how they apply to our lives, over and over again. But it wasn't until I was 14 when a Youth For Christ travelling theatre group came to our church and performed some play or other, I can't remember what it was, but it was at the end of their performance that one of the team, a lady called Bridget, came over and spoke to me. And for the first time - probably after quite a few times - in that moment, the penny dropped: all of this stuff I'd heard about Jesus and about God and the Holy Spirit, who He was, what he'd done: it was all done for me. It wasn't just that Jesus loved everyone else, it wasn't just that He died for everyone else. He loves me, and He died for me too.

So what was it in that moment that made me a Christian? Was it the people who'd shared Jesus and the Bible with me over all of those years? No! Yes, they played a part, and they gave me some foundational understanding and some background knowledge, but they definitely didn't open my eyes to the Gospel. Do I think it was Bridget that made me a Christian and converted me? No. She had a part to play, and she was bold enough to have that conversation with me, but it wasn't her that made me a Christian. So was it *me* that made me a Christian? Again, no. I had a part to play in it, in that I had to hear the message and I had to respond to what was going on inside me, but I didn't make myself a Christian. So the only option left, is that it was God, who is all-knowing, all-loving, all-powerful. Through His Spirit, He made me a Christian. Now I'd heard the Gospel over and over again, but it hadn't resonated inside me, and the truth of it hadn't been opened up to me. I have no doubt at all that it was due to God leading me to be in the right place at the right time, and the right things were spoken and said, which then resonated inside me.

Ephesians chapter 1, verses 17 to 18 says,

**17** I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. **18** I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people.

So Paul is asking God to open the eyes of the Ephesians' hearts. It's God that opens the things up for us. We don't open them for ourselves. So have a think for yourself. Can you remember the moment when something clicked? When something resonated within you? When it went from being head knowledge to heart knowledge? It's only God that holds the key to unlocking the truth of the Gospel for each one of us. In Ephesians 2 (next chapter on), it says

**4** ... because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, **5** made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. **6** And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, **7** in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. **8** For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – **9** not by works, so that no one can boast.

**10** For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

It's because of God's great love for us: He made us alive with Christ. It's by grace we are saved. We can't earn God's grace. We can't buy God's grace. There is absolutely nothing that we can do to gain God's grace – but – it's through the grace of God that He chooses us and chooses when and where we will hear the words that open our eyes to His truth.

So if you go back a chapter again, go back to Ephesians 1, and we're going to read quite a long chunk of it, from verse 3 to verse 14 (We will get to Romans in a minute, promise!) It says

**3** Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. **4** For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love **5** he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – **6** to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. **7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace **8** that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, **9** he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, **10** to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment – to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

**11** In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, **12** in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. **13** And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, **14** who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory.

You see, God chose you before the creation of the world! He chose you! Denise sent out children's activities for you this week and in them, she's given

activities linked to the parable that Jesus told about the wedding banquet in Matthew 22. And at the end of that parable Jesus says, "Many are called, but few are chosen."

You were chosen.

So if God chose us before the creation of the world. He knows exactly who will, and who won't choose to respond when they hear the Gospel. So what's the point in sharing the Gospel with anyone? Andrew's been talking about it with us for weeks. Why does God need us to say anything to other people or do anything other than believe for ourselves? God could just use a booming voice, all around us, for those that He chooses to hear. But He chooses not to. He chooses to involve us in bringing others, not-yet-believers, to Himself. So this is where our reading from Romans 10 comes in. Let's just look at it again. We're just going to go with the last couple of verses of it. It says,

**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? **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!'

It does then go on to say,

**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.

So this bit in verses 14 and 15, where Paul is basically going through the journey of an unbeliever to believer, but in reverse, it's everybody's journey of salvation. People are sent, they preach the Gospel, unbelievers hear, then they believe, and then they call on the Lord to be saved. And when Paul's talking about preaching here, he's not talking about going around and being an evangelist. He uses the Greek word *kēryssō* [κηρύσσω], which means to proclaim the Gospel, or to announce publicly the good news of the Gospel. It just means to speak it out to people. So this verse shows us that people believe if they hear the Gospel from another believer. It might be from a conversation or whatever else, but unless someone actually hears the words of the Gospel from another believer, they're not going to come to Christ. There is power in the actual words of the Gospel.

I don't know how much you know about Paul's experience of coming to know Jesus, but we hear about it in Acts 9: Saul's out on his way to continue persecuting Christians, and God stops him on the way. God speaks to Saul and tells him to go to a city where someone will come and speak to him and tell him what to do. Now God could have used that moment, He's already speaking to Saul. He could have used that moment to explain who Jesus was and what He'd done and all that stuff, but He doesn't. God speaks separately to Ananias and sends him to go and meet Paul. Ananias is faithful and obedient. And God sends him, even though he's scared because Saul's just been out persecuting Christians. Ananias does what God tells him to, he goes and he speaks to Saul, and then Saul comes to faith.

And if you go on a chapter to Acts 10, there's an account of Cornelius: he's a Roman centurion who follows after God. And God appears to Cornelius in a vision, and He tells him to send to the city for Peter. Separately God speaks to Peter and shows him that even Gentiles, of which obviously the Roman centurion was one, even Gentiles can be accepted by God. And so Peter's called and he goes to Cornelius and his family, and he shares the Gospel with them and they start to believe. God already had Cornelius's attention: He was speaking to him in a vision; but instead He chose to use Peter. Peter was open to what the Spirit was telling him to do and he went and he did it.

God uses us as His mouthpiece. He wants us to be His messengers. Instead of sharing the message directly with Saul and Cornelius, He pointed them to believers who shared the truth with them. Imagine if Saul had never heard it.

You might say, "Well that's all well and good for them, but I'm just little old me." That is generally my phrase about me, "But a little old me - What can I do?" Well, there's examples in the Bible of not-so-important people playing their part in these stories too. Acts 7 tells us about Stephen: he was just a normal bloke, he was a deacon, which in those days just meant that he was someone who served the physical and the logistical needs of the Church, to allow the elders to do the leading. Now he had a vision about Jesus and he got himself killed because he was out there sharing the truth about the vision that he had had. He gets cast out of the city and stoned. And there's a little line in there, in Acts [7:58] that says "the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man called Saul." Saul was there! He'd have heard what Stephen had been saying. God used Stephen's boldness to make a huge impact by Saul hearing the truth. Stephen was just being faithful, he had no idea what Saul was going to go on to do. And there are so many other examples throughout the Bible of everyday people playing their part sharing the Gospel. I'm not going to go into it now, but look up Barnabas in Acts 11, look up what he did. Again, he's just an everyday guy, but if it wasn't for him taking Saul back to the apostles and advocating for him and bringing Saul back into the community, who knows what would have happened? Barnabas was just being faithful.

So, coming back to the question I asked you at the beginning, who was it who shared the Gospel with you? How important was that person's faithfulness and obedience in stepping out and sharing it with you? And what would your life look like now if they haven't shared it with you? What part do the people in my life that had shared the Gospel with me beforehand play? Because that's still important. But I think that 1 Corinthians 3 verses 5-9 explains it pretty well. It says,

5 What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. 6 I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. 9 For we are fellow workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

We all need to plant. We all need to water. We all need to share who God is and what Jesus did, because we don't know where a person of peace is along their journey. It might be that you're the one who's planting the original seed; you might be the very first person to even talk about Jesus to somebody. But you might not be the first person to share it with them, you might be the fifth or the sixth or the tenth, I don't know, the hundredth person to be talking to someone about Jesus. It might be that you're just watering the seed that has been planted by someone else. Every time you share the Gospel, your own faith gets reinforced, it gets strengthened. And that's our reward for planting the seeds, for watering the seeds and for bringing in the harvest too. You might be the person who gets to bring in the harvest, you might be the person who God has prepared the words of, to speak, deep into another person's heart. And it might be your words that God uses to bring that person to Himself. We're all called to proclaim the Gospel. God works through His people. He knows who needs to hear what words, and when. He wants to draw people to Himself, and we need to be open to His Spirit, where He is leading, and ready to share the Gospel at all times. We should be putting on the armour of God every day, look it up<sup>3</sup>. And that includes the Gospel of peace, you should be prepared to share it at all times. And remember, you don't succeed by bringing someone to faith, it's never you that brings someone to faith. God is the one that makes Christians, the pressure is completely off us. All we're called to do is to share the message. If you've done that, you've succeeded. So going forward from here, what do we need to do?

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3 Ephesians 6:10-20

- Pray! We need to pray that God will be preparing the hearts of those that you come into contact with, to hear. Pick two or three people to pray for specifically by name, pray that God will give you opportunities to share.
- Pray for boldness, pray that God will give you the words that not-yet-believers need to hear.
- And if you don't know how to share the Gospel there's so many mnemonics or reminders, or tips and tricks available. Just Google it! Like, find out easy ways to share the Gospel.

But prepare yourself. If you're not practised in directing conversations around spiritual issues then practice with your Christian friends. Ask them what God's been doing in their life lately. When they've got issues that come up, don't just say you'll pray about it and then go away and pray: stand there and pray with them in the middle of the street, in the middle of the supermarket, in a coffee shop, wherever you are, just stand and pray with them. Because when it comes to talking to non-Christians, it makes it so much easier. You've got that practice prepared and ready. 1 Peter 3 verse 15 says, "Always be prepared to share the reason for the hope you have in Christ Jesus." Be prepared. Because when you pray those prayers that I mentioned a minute ago, God will give you the opportunities. He will answer.

I'm going to pass back over to Phil now.

## ***Prayerful Response***

[Phil:]

Michelle, thank you very much indeed. Much to think about there.

And as we think about what Michelle has been saying to us, we're going to move into a time of prayer now, so let's come before the Lord in prayer.

Father, thank You for Michelle's word to us. We know that You want us to be Your messengers in a world, that badly needs to hear Your message.

So Lord, put on our hearts the people for whom You want us to pray, perhaps people well known to us, or people we bump into occasionally; put on our hearts the names of two or three people with whom we can share the Gospel in some way.

Lord, help us to prepare. Help us to remember those words in 1 Peter 3:15, always be ready, always be prepared to give an account of the Gospel, because we never know when we will be called upon to give that word,

And help us, Lord, to seek opportunities to bring that word. Help us to start each day with an open heart and open eyes: where can we bring the Good News today.

Many people need to hear the Good News: if you're listening to, watching this service, and you're intrigued by this, perhaps you don't know the grace of God through Jesus Christ in your life. Perhaps you want to find out more about it. Well, contact us through the website [[www.stjohn316.co.uk](http://www.stjohn316.co.uk)]. And we can help you out there, we can put you in touch with someone with whom you can talk.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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