

Fullness of Time: The Point of It All
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DANE

If you brought a bible, go ahead and turn there, and if you need one there should be one on the rack of the seat in front of you, you can find this passage on page _____. I heard this story told one time of a man who was living in the United Kingdom for a period of time for school, he was there finishing his doctorate degree and he was living there for a little bit with his wife and son. Now if you're anything like me, the only thing you know about the United Kingdom is that they have a queen, and that's exactly where I am headed with this story. This man had heard of a big parade happening, something like 1400 soldiers, 200 horses, and 400 musicians would be present at this parade, but if that isn't enticing enough, the royal family and the queen were also going to be making an appearance at this parade. Now the parade wasn't going to be too far away from where this family lived, and so the man thought that it was a wonderful thing to do with his son, they hadn't lived in England for too long, it would get him out of the house for a bit, let his wife have some time alone to relax. So, dad and son were going to take a bonding trip to go see the queen. They arrive and actually have a pretty good spot, in fact they were in one of the front rows of this parade and nobody super tall was blocking his son from being able to see anything. Now this parade was a lot different than parades back here in the states, there were no inflatable spongebobs, there wasn't tootsie rolls and laffy taffy being thrown at you, all in all, the son thought the parade was pretty boring. Apart from the ridiculous hats that the British soldiers all wore, and the horses that were admittedly pretty cool, everything else seemed to be pretty boring. Until, he saw the carriage. The rest of the horses had been cool, but these horses pulling the carriage were just beautiful. The music started to change into something slower and more elegant, and the son was enamored, thrilled by seeing the carriage. I mean the outside of it was covered with these neat little plants and there were some cool lights that were stuck on top. The man riding and directing the carriage was not wearing the traditional red suit, he was wearing a gold suit that only he was wearing. And the wheels on that thing were so cool, they were massive and looked like they were taken right off the back of an old model t car, I mean the son was finally interested in this parade. There was no other carriage like this one. The soldiers marching in step right next to the carriage meant nothing to him, the only thing that mattered was this carriage. Well eventually that carriage had past him, and

all the crowd started to slowly head home including him and his dad. His dad said, “well what did you think?” And the son said “it was ok.” Dad said “ok? Just ok? Well what was your favorite part?” And then son without even hesitating said “the cart was.” Dad is racking his brain to think the cart the cart, I mean there were several carts, but admittedly one of them was far cooler than the rest, and that was the one the queen was riding in. So he said, “oh you mean the carriage with the queen?” To which the son replied, “what queen?” Being so enamored and focused on the carriage, the son completely missed the queen riding in the carriage. You can be in the presence of royalty, and yet still be looking at the wrong things. That’s exactly what Paul is talking about here in Romans 9. Where we pick up, Paul is talking about this same frustration with the Israelites, how they missed the point. In verse 30 it says this,

“30 What then shall we say? That the Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have obtained it, a righteousness that is by faith; 31 but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. 32 Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone.

33 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.”

(Romans 9:30-33)

But the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness have not attained their goal. And later, in chapter 10 Paul says this,

Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. 2 For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. 3 Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. (Romans 10:1-3)

Paul here is talking about Jews or Israelites who followed the “law”. Some of you may know what Paul means by the law, but what he is referring to here is Torah. Torah is the first five books of the Bible, the same text that we read. And it’s called the law, because there are 613 laws in these 5 books, these guys were really clever with their naming. And these laws were taken by the Jewish people and made into the guideposts of their lives. You might be thinking dude that is way too many laws and you’re right. If the Israelites pursued the law as a way of righteousness, that means that even breaking even one law out of those 613 makes you unrighteous. For example, if you lie once, you’re a liar. But Paul is

pointing out that when the people of Israel have tried so hard to follow every single rule to make sure they are righteous, they really are missing it.

He says in verse 4,

“Christ is the goal of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.” (Romans 10:4)

In other words, the entire reason the law exists, is because Jesus. He was the point all along. Israel was trying so hard to obey all the rules, that they missed the person of Jesus. They were looking so intently at the carriage, that they didn't even see the royalty inside of it.

EMILY

Israel was trying so hard to obey the law that they missed the person of Jesus. The Israelites had this law as a framework for their life. Every action, every decision, every word and thought were shaped in every way by the law. Their entire life's purpose was found in these 613 laws. In framing their lives, deciding the purpose of their days, they missed the point. They missed Jesus. This leads me to ask myself, what am I framing my life around? What is the purpose of how I live? What is the foundation of my actions, my decisions, my words and thoughts? When I look at the purpose of my life, what is my goal?

Now I am $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way done with a children's ministry degree and spend most of my Sundays teaching kids, so my brain thinks in object lessons. When I hear a Bible story, I automatically begin thinking of a science experiment. And quite frankly, I don't think adults get enough object lessons, so to make up for that I have one for you today.

Some of you may be familiar with the story in Matthew 7 about the wise and foolish builders. So, I want you to picture with me two completely different people. They're looking to buy a house, then realize that's impossible in Spring Hill right now, so they decide to build their own. So, the first guy decides to build his house on the beach. Every person's dream, right? He finds a plot of sand and gets to building a cute little house, complete with windows and doors.

And he is all settled in here. But the next guy decides he doesn't want to have to sweep up sand all day so he finds a nice rock and builds his cute little house, complete with windows and doors, and gets settled there. One day, a storm comes, and there is a huge downpour of rain. My guy over here, settled on his rock, is completely fine. The house survives. But my buddy over here, his house is completely destroyed. Everything he had is gone.

Jesus tells this story in Matthew 7 to demonstrate the difference between people that obey and follow Christ versus people that don't. Jesus says this, "24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand." (Matthew 7: 24, 26)

People that hear the word of God and obey it are like the wise man that built his house on the rock. People that hear the word of God and do not obey it are like the foolish man that built his house on the sand. The difference was never who heard the word of Christ, they both did. The difference was who obeyed. The difference between the wise man and the foolish man was what they decided to build their foundation on. And as the storms came, and the pressures and hardships of life became present, only one foundation could survive. The difference between our life failing or flourishing is our foundation. When we build our lives on anything other than Jesus, the solid rock, we are foolish. We are staking our lives in something temporary, rather than something eternal. It's not going to last.

So, I ask again: what are we building our lives on? What are we framing our lives around? What is the foundation of our actions, our decisions, our words and thoughts? When we look at the purpose of our lives, what is our goal? So often I find myself filling my life with things that are good, that I neglect what is essential. I choose good things, good actions, good works, over a relationship with Jesus. Those things are important, but if I become the most successful person in every aspect of my life but never have a relationship with Jesus, I've missed the point. If my purpose and foundation are found in anything other than Christ, I missed it.

This summer, Dane, Noah, and I had the chance to go to elementary camp with a bunch of kids from WellSpring. This week is always one of my favorite weeks of the year and this year was no different: it was such a cool time in which the kids came to know more about the God who created them. So, we got up to the camp, settled into the dorms, and went to get into our small groups. And I learned that, for the week, I was leading a group of first graders. Now this was their first time away from home, especially for a week, so I very quickly learned that everything was a big deal. Remembering to go to the bathroom, remembering to take a shower, remembering to put shoes on, it was all things they weren't used to doing on their own. But they were a blast and we had the best time all together. So one day we sit down in our small group to eat lunch and the cafeteria is serving

hot dogs with chili and nacho cheese. Every kid's dream. So one kid in my group waits through the entire line, finally gets his tray, sits down next to me, and gets to work preparing his hot dog. Now this was no simple task. He took his chip and carefully scooped every ounce of chili and nacho cheese onto his hot dog. This was a full ten-minute process in which he never said a word to anyone around him, he was dead focused. After ten long minutes, he taps me on the shoulder and proudly says "look at my work! Look at what I made!" So, I congratulated him, told him it looked great, and he takes his first very first bite. By this point, almost every other kid is done with their meal, so right once he takes his first bite, the kitchen manager yells out "seconds!" telling the kids they can go get more. So, this kid, very flustered, shoves the entire hot dog, cheese and all, in his mouth. There is chili dripping down his face as he rushed up to get in line to get another hot dog. This was one of the funniest things I have ever seen because this poor kid spent ten minutes preparing a hot dog he barely even tasted.

The point was never about making the hot dog, it was about eating it. This kid tried so hard, harder than any other kid at the table, and yet he missed the whole point. Some of us are working so hard at our careers to provide for our families, but we're missing them in the process. Some of us are working so hard to fix up our houses that we don't enjoy our home in the process. In the same way, some of us are working so hard at doing all of the right things, but we're missing Jesus in the process.

Thinking of that moment, of that kid, reminds me of the story of Mary and Martha. Mary and Martha were two sisters that were close to Jesus and invited him over for dinner. In preparation for this meal, Martha found herself busy doing all sorts of things. I would imagine she was cooking all of the best food, making sure her house was perfectly clean, doing all of the laundry and chores she had been putting off. And who could blame her? She invited the savior of the world over for dinner. This is not the time for instant mac and cheese. But as she was running around, doing all of these preparations, Mary, her sister, was sitting at the feet of Jesus. She was listening to his teachings, talking with Jesus and sitting so close to him. Well this made Martha upset, because she was doing everything all by herself. So, she goes over to Jesus, furious that she was doing it alone, and asked **40b** "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" (Luke 10:40b)

Listen to how Jesus responds.

41 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, **42** but few things are needed—or indeed only one.[f] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41-42)

What Martha was doing was not bad. Cooking and cleaning and preparing your house for Jesus are not bad, those are good things that have to be done sometimes. But what Mary was doing was essential. She chose what was better. She sat with Jesus and learned from him, focusing on her relationship with Christ before anything else. Martha worked so hard and tried so hard, but missed the point of the whole evening: to spend time with Jesus.

This is where we find ourselves. We spend our lives doing things, a lot of which are good and important. But so often, we miss the whole point. This is where the Israelites were, focused on creating their own righteousness and forgetting to discover the righteousness of God. The Israelites were unable to create their own righteousness. And though I try, time and time again, I am unable to create my own righteousness. I cannot produce fruit or live a life of meaning apart from Jesus. Neither can you. We cannot make our lives more full of love, more full of joy, more full of goodness and kindness, just from trying harder. Or from saying all the right things. Or from being good enough. Or from being the smartest, funniest, most successful in the room. We can study all the right things and work as hard as we can, but we can't fill our lives with peace and love on our own. That's just not possible. We have to be as close to Jesus as we can. That's our job. My job, my purpose in life, is to be as close to Jesus as possible, but I so often miss it. I have stood in the face of royalty and missed it.

In Romans 10, Paul tells us this:

“Christ is the goal of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”(Romans 10:4)

When we take the law, we take the framework of our lives, the thing that dictates our very being, and we pull from it one key unifying factor, is it Christ? When we look at the sum of all of the ways we spend our time, all of the things we seek, all of our goals and desires, do we see Christ?

Because Paul is telling us that without Christ, we have come so close, we have tried so hard, and yet we have worked towards the wrong goal. Our framework, our motivations, our purpose, it all has to point back to Jesus. Jesus wants us to be close to him.

Let's do something together. Read this verse, John 14:15, where Jesus tells his disciples “If you love me, keep my commands.” (John 14:15)

Read that, spend some time with it, and think through what your response to this verse is. Where does this leave us? (pause) If you're anything like me, you may read this and think "shoot, I need to try harder." Give me sixty seconds and I can list for you time and time and time again that I have failed to keep Jesus's commands. I can give you a long list of sins and shortcomings and ways I have messed up. I read this verse and am reminded that I need to try harder, I need to work harder, I need to do more and be more. (pause) But I don't think this is what that verse is saying. I don't think the verse is telling me to try harder. Because if I love Jesus, if I am good with Jesus, if I am working on my relationship with Jesus, it works out. Keeping those commands will come as an overflow of my love for Jesus. Keeping his commands, living the best life I can live, comes when I devote myself to being as close as I can to Jesus.

DANE

So, what happens if we do miss it? What happens if we are in the presence of royalty and miss it? Let's read what Jesus says in Matthew 7. Matthew 7:21-23 says this

"21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. **22** Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and, in your name, perform many miracles?' **23** Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"
(Matthew 7:21-23)

Now I'll be honest, this is tough. There is something in us that takes pride in doing good things. And I can't help but supplement the things that I do into this passage. Lord, Lord, did we not tell the truth! Did we not treat others as we want to be treated? Did we not forgive others and have integrity and stay faithful to our spouses and give money to those who need it! These are good things. All of them are good and right for us to do. But did you know Jesus? Maybe you're in this room like me putting all of our effort on being a good, moral, upstanding, respectable person. I want people to think highly of me, I want people to view me as kind and loving. And yet while we do all of these things and strive for it, we have missed the point, just like the Jews did, just like the kid at the parade did. I don't think the world is in short supply of nice people. There are nice people all across this globe, but I do think this world is in short supply of people who are laser-focused entirely on the person of Jesus. Perhaps you are in this room right now for one of the first times, or maybe you are just now checking out

this whole Jesus thing. This chapter in Romans 10 actually ends with a verse that I think is for all of us today, "But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people." (Romans 10:21)

It's funny that it begins with "concerning Israel" because it feels like it also could apply to us...I mean admittedly we are disobedient and obstinate. But i love that it says, "all day long I have held out my hands." Jesus is holding out his hands for me and for you. It's ok that we are disobedient and stubborn, his hands are still stretched out. Void of us focusing on other things or missing the point completely, Jesus still wants you and me. It's a possibility that we miss it.... it's possible that we continue trying our hardest to do the right things and focus on being a good moral person. But we also have a great opportunity to focus on Jesus. It might be really easy to watch the carriage go by and be so enamored by everything else, but it's also an amazing time to look into the face of royalty.