

**THE BIG “IF”  
Romans 10:1-21**

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Let me start the sentence – you finish it in your own mind. “I have been disappointed by....”

I can only imagine that there would be a million and one ways to finish such an open-ended sentence. I surfed the internet to find out what people had to say about disappointment. One responder named Timmy wrote, **“I’ve been disappointed by not getting the girl of my dreams.”** I couldn’t help but wonder, when I read that, if his girlfriend might have finished her sentence with “not getting the boy of my dreams.” I guess that never crossed Timmy’s mind.

A responder named Floppy Fish said, **“Becoming an adult. It’s a lot more stressful than I imagined it would be as a kid.”** Becoming an adult is disappointing, isn’t it?

Another writer said, **“Currently failing a class I need to pass to graduate high school.”**

John wrote, **“I’ve had three – all suicide attempts.”** Now, that’s heavy. John is disappointed that his suicide attempts have failed.

How would you finish the sentence? “I’ve been disappointed by....”

“I’ve been disappointed by my wife.”

“I’ve been disappointed by my husband.”

“I’ve been disappointed by that food processor I ordered from QVC.”

“I’ve been disappointed by corporate America.”

“I’ve been disappointed by my employer – promised I’d get a raise and promotion in six months. That was 36 months ago.”

You remember the disappointments you’ve had in life. Maybe disappointed by a child. Maybe disappointed by a parent. Maybe disappointed by the pain of real living in a broken world.

Do you remember your first disappointment? I do – my first really, really big – big, gargantuan disappointment. It was with Hot Wheels. You remember when you’re a kid and you’re watching Saturday morning cartoons (for those of you old enough to remember Saturday morning cartoons). The toy commercials – man, those Hot Wheels on those toy commercials would go forever and ever. They went through water, through the woods, over a bridge, through the fire. It was endless, non-stop, zip, zap, flying fun.

Well, we ordered all the Hot Wheels and we set them up. And, you know, mine didn't work quite like that. There was no water, no fire, no wild animals in the woods through the safari. It just wasn't like it was on TV.

That was my first major disappointment – that the toys on TV didn't bring the bang they promised when bought at Christmas time.

We've all had bigger disappointments than that. Disappointed in a marriage. Disappointed in your life's path – where the journey of life has taken you. Disappointed in the results of a surgery that promised so much and delivered so little. Disappointed in treatments. Disappointed in an institution. Disappointed in church.

Disappointment, sometimes, can be pretty discouraging.

I received a pretty big disappointment one time. Had a phone message, left on my answering machine, that said I needed to call Christy with So-and-So Royalties out of Plainview, Texas. Well, it didn't sound like mass marketing – she knew my name. I called back, and she said, "I've got something to talk to you about, but I'm with another client. Can I call you back in a few minutes?" At this point I was interested enough that I gave her my cell phone. She called. She introduced herself and said there was some land in so-and-so county, and I was the holder of the mineral rights. Her particular firm was ready to sign a contract and cut a deal. Would I be willing to talk?

Well, you have that moment – that "too good to be true" moment. Did someone leave me mineral rights in another county? Or maybe this is a call on behalf of the church, maybe it's First Baptist Church. People do that sometimes. Yes, we're interested in talking about these mineral rights for our congregation. "I don't know. You might have the wrong person."

"Are you Howard Batson?"

"Oh yes, I'm Howard Batson. Maybe I'm the right person."

"Well, are you Howard David Batson?"

"Howard David Batson? No, I'm Howard K. Batson, Howard Keith Batson."

"Oh, sorry."

"Yea, I bet you are," I said, "but not nearly as sorry as I am. You've got the wrong Howard Batson."

That happened on a Friday. And you know, on Monday she called me again. She'd forgotten we talked, and she started talking to me about the mineral rights and cutting the contract and all the money. She started that conversation all over again. This is a disappointment I had to face twice. "Ma'am, we already talked on Friday. I already told you I am not Howard David Batson."

“Oh,” she said, “I keep trying to make it you.”

I said, “Yeah, well keep trying till you get there.” But it’s not to be – no gusher in my future. Not even any groundwater rights.

I know you’ve been disappointed, too.

But have you ever had anyone say, “I promise that if you do this, you will not be disappointed”? That always peaks my interest. What do you have that will keep me from ever being disappointed? I’m interested.

That’s what Paul says in Romans 10:11. Let’s take a look at our text today.

Romans 9, 10, and 11 concern the salvation of ancient Israel. Paul is trying to get God’s people – which are also his people – to understand that the promises made to Abraham are marked out by faith alone, and not the deeds of the Jewish law. And that’s why Gentiles who believe in the gospel are counted as full members of the people of God.

Paul himself had previously used the law as a badge of privilege. But the law was never meant to work that way. And that’s why, in their confusion about the purpose of the law, they tripped over the stone – the Messiah – who is the foundation of the true family of God (9:33).

In fact, the Messiah is the goal of God’s law. This is where God’s strange purposes have been heading all along. Look Romans 10:4. “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

Paul wants his fellow Jews to be saved. Look at 10:1. “Brethren, my heart’s desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation.” Paul was one of them. His heart is going out to them. He understood them. He wants to explain to them that God has unveiled His plan of salvation and it’s a single way for all people. God has brought His salvation near to them, indeed, near to everyone. And if the Jews want the salvation now provided in their own Messiah, they must, as Paul had learned, share their Messiah and have the covenant family redefined in Him with much larger kinship than they would have ever imagined.

What’s Paul’s solution to salvation – both for the Jew and the Gentile?

### **I. First of all, I want you to see the big “IF” (v. 9)**

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

The big IF doesn’t say that all men will be saved. It says that men who confess Jesus as Lord, and believe in their heart that God raised Him from the dead – they will be saved.

You’ve probably confronted some big IFs before in your life.

If you bought the warranty....  
If you exercise three times a week, then....  
If you are able to get a seat in Dr. Smith's class, then...  
If you have a ticket to the ballgame, then....

But if not,  
If you didn't buy the warranty, then you don't have the coverage.  
If you don't have the ticket, then you're not getting in the gate.  
If you don't have a seat in the class, then you will miss the lectures and the credit toward your graduation.  
If you don't exercise three times a week, then you can't expect good health.

Life is full of big IFs, but Paul gives us the biggest IF of all: "If you confess Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead, then – if...then – you will be saved."

Saying Jesus is Lord is what people did at their baptism. In Paul's first century world, "Lord" was a title for Caesar. Saying Jesus was Lord meant ultimately Caesar was not lord (N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone, Romans Part 2*, p. 33). And Paul quotes from the prophet Joel in verse 13. "Lord" in that passage refers, of course, to the Lord of the Old Testament. Yahweh is Israel's God. Paul is saying that Jesus is the Messiah who died and rose again. He is the embodiment of Israel's Lord. Jesus is Yahweh. He is Lord.

Now, this is not a coincidence. This is not a one-time thing – the big IF. Paul has insisted on the big IF in all of his letters.

For example, in 1 Thessalonians 4:14, we read, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus." If we believe in the story of Jesus, then we have eternal life in Him. The big IF.

Now, in verses 8-10, Paul pulls our heart and our mouths together. We believe in our hearts, and after we believe in our hearts the story of Jesus, then we confess with our mouths. The result of the heart and the confession together is salvation.

## **II. The big promise (v. 11; 9:33)**

The big promise, scripture says, is "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed." It comes from Isaiah 28:16. For those who are preoccupied with Paul's use of predestination earlier in chapter 8, do not rule out what he says here in verse 13. "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

It's a big promise, and you will not be disappointed.

What was the last promise you made to someone?

"Yes, honey, I'll take the trash out after dinner." And then in the morning, "Did you take out the trash?"

“No, I forgot.”

If you're like me, you make commitments to others all the time. But the question is, how often do you keep your promise?

The thing is, God always keeps God's promises. It's the big promise – the promise beyond every other promise. The scripture says, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.”

I read the story of a young man in Fort Worth, Texas, by the name of Torrean Johnson. Torrean is an outstanding African-American student at Southwest High. His physics teacher, Kristin Cotton, nominated him for a very prestigious scholarship – the Gates Millennium Scholar Program. Each year the program awards life-changing scholarships to 1,000 high achieving, low income minorities: a full ride to the college of their choice.

Kristin Cotton was so excited when she got the email. She cried – just burst into tears. She called up Torrean immediately. “It was utter joy,” says Torrean. He wanted to study biomedical engineering, and he'd finally found a way to fulfill his every dream. Torrean went to his own email to see the matching confirmation about his scholarship, and his email said he'd been denied the scholarship. Turns out the letter going to the nominating physics teacher was a mistake. An employee of the Foundation made a mistake and sent out erroneous award announcements to 276 nominating teachers nationwide.

“Well, I cried a second time,” said Kristin Cotton.

The Gates Millennium Scholar Program apologized in another email – you know, the usual blah, blah – “To our deep embarrassment, we have discovered through feedback from many of you that an error by a member of our staff led to you receiving incorrect information. We deeply regret” – blah, blah, blah – “if this has in any way inconvenienced you and/or the student.”

Inconvenienced? How about crushed every dream the kid ever had. “I was really counting on this scholarship to provide me what I needed,” Johnson says. The kid is fourth in his class, student council president, and he made it to the state competition in tenor sax in jazz band. What more did he have to have in order to actually get the scholarship?

It was one big disappointment.

Not so with the gospel. The announcement has been made; it can never be taken back. The announcement has been made, and it can hold all of your weight and hold all of your hopes. Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.

### **III. The big boundaries.**

Look at verses 12 and 13.

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Yahweh is the god of “whosoever will.” Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will receive His salvation.

Look at Romans 3:22. There is no difference. There is only one salvation and one Lord. The same Lord is lord of all. The Greeks and Jews can only have one way for salvation because there is but one Lord over both. Then he gives us that beautiful quote from 10:13 that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. This is a comprehensive command. There is no exception. We do not have a Lord who died for the few. He died for all. Those who look to Him for salvation will be saved. They will not be disappointed.

Folks, the reality is the resurrection of Jesus sent a cosmic earthquake through all of creation. The message of sin, the message of corruption and death have been overthrown once and for all, and a new creation was launched upon this world – a new creation beginning in the resurrection of our Lord. The gospel message concerning Jesus is the fulfillment of everything that the Creator had ever planned for His creation.

I know most of you have had a lot of disappointments in life. I know that I have, and I know that you have, disappointed others. But we serve a God who never disappoints those who follow the big IF – call Jesus Lord, confess with the mouth that God raised Him from the dead, and you shall be saved.

Now, let me update you about Torrean Johnson.

When I first used this story in 2013 in an article in *Ethics Daily*, Torrean Johnson sent a link to the article to his former teacher, Kristin Cotton. Ms. Cotton emailed me in January 2014 with an update on Torrean. She wrote:

“Good morning. My former student, Torrean Johnson, sent me this link to your message. Well, I wanted you to know that after the article was published and subsequently aired on CNN, a woman from California got in touch with me about Torrean. To make a long story short, this woman in California felt so compelled by Torrean’s story – she was able to have the foundation that she works for give Torrean the remainder of the scholarship money that he needed! So I wanted to let you know that there was a happy ending to this story, and God did provide!”

I’ve got the email from Kristin Cotton right here.