

SR08214

“People of God: The Difficult Button”

Genesis 21:8-21

Romans 10:5-15

It was one of the great advertising images of all time; the Easy Button. How many of you remember the Easy Button? It was the center of Staples advertising for a considerable period of time. The commercials would run like this. A man would bemoan the fact that he had just run out of ink cartridges or toner. Someone else would say, here use my easy button. The man would press the button and suddenly the supplies would appear. Or it was someone who needed to have a presentation printed by the next day...and presto, hit the easy button and there it was. It was a great campaign then not only because it made us remember Staples but because we all wanted an easy button. The house is a mess, company is coming and you know there is not enough time to clean...Easy Button and it is spotless. Or you are trying to remove a rusted head bolt from your 67 Camaro...easy button and it just pops loose. Finally it was a great campaign because it was imitated thousands of times. One of my favorite YouTube knock off Easy Button videos had a kid who couldn't get a date and even his mother tells him he needs a better body to do it...and as he hits the Easy Button he suddenly looks like a kid from a boy band.

Over the years one of the places that I have heard people desiring an easy button is with the Christian Faith. They have been very confused about many of the doctrines that the church has historically held and they come to me looking for easy answers. “John, what is this Trinity thing?” As I begin to explain the history of the development of the doctrine I can see them hitting the easy button and I say, “Just think of an egg; white, yoke and shell, three in one” Or they come to me asking, “John, listen will you please explain to me how Jesus can be both fully human and fully divine. That just doesn't make a lot of sense to me. Does that mean he prays to himself?” Again as I draw on Biblical references they mentally hit the Easy Button and I say, “OK, think about an egg...” Finally they ask me about predestination. As the Reformed pastor I am, I begin to explain how Calvin used it and once again they hit the Easy Button. Whereupon I reply, “God chose you. You did not choose God.” The bottom line then is that Christians have always looked for an easy button and many have found it in verse 9 of our text from Romans.

Verse nine reads in this way. *“If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”* There it is, the Easy Button. All of Christianity can be boiled down to a simple formula. First one publically proclaims that Jesus is Lord. Then one believes that God raised him. There is nothing else that one needs to do. This understanding is at the heart of the entire revivalist movement, stretching from the Great Awakening to our current day. Revivals are held with one aim in mind, convincing people to profess and believe. This simple Easy Button formula is intended, as the preachers will tell you, to save you from hell and get you into heaven. Don't do this and you belong to the guy with the pitch fork. Do it and you get to be beamed up to heaven and hang out with all of the true Christians who have preceded you by pushing the

same Easy Button. This is why certain churches have altar calls at the end of each service. They want people to push the Easy Button.

All of that button pushing would be fine if that was what Paul actually had in mind when he wrote this letter. But what I want to offer you this morning is that I do not believe that Paul understood this profession and belief as an Easy Button; as a short cut out of hell and into heaven. Instead I think Paul would have seen this as the Difficult Button, and here is why; Paul was a good messianic Jew.

Let me explain. Paul was a good Jew who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the long awaited messiah who had ushered God's Kingdom into the world. As a good Jew, Paul understood clearly that a profession about God, or the messiah, was not an Easy Button. It was in fact an agreement to do whatever God asked of you. When Jews said the Schema, "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God is one..." they were not making an intellectual statement. They were saying that they would do whatever that one God asked of them. We can see this in our Old Testament lesson. Abraham finally got the son with Sarah that he had always been promised. Sarah, however was jealous of Abraham's other son, Ishmael. She tries to force Abraham to send Ishmael and his mother Hagar into the desert to die. Abraham resists, or resists until God comes to him and reminds him of the covenant promise that Abraham would be the father of many nations. God tells Abraham to send Hagar and Ishmael into the desert because God would not only take care of them, but bless them. So Abraham does as God asks and sends them out. He does so because this is what it meant to profess this one God...you were to do whatever that God asked.

So when Paul tells the Roman church that they are to profess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead, Paul is asking them to act upon that profession. Paul is asking them to live as if those things were true. What he is asking them to do is to commit to forgiving as Jesus and God forgave them. He is asking them to take up their cross daily and suffer on behalf of Christ trusting that one day they would be raised as was Jesus. He is also asking them to share their worldly goods with other believers as Jesus had asked. He is also asking them to pray for and love their enemies just as Jesus did. He is asking them to risk their careers, their family ties, their place in society and everything else to be obedient to the one whom they have proclaimed as Lord, because by proclaiming Jesus as Lord, they were publically declaring that Caesar is not their Lord and master. That title belonged to a crucified and resurrected carpenter. This is no Easy Button allowing one to escape hell and enter into heaven. This is a Difficult Button calling them to lead a radically different and difficult way of life in the here and now. And if you do not believe me, ask those Iraqis who have lost everything because they refuse to convert to another faith, but instead steadfastly call Jesus, Lord.

I understand clearly that the Difficult Button is not nearly as attractive as the Easy Button. After all we are the people who invented paint by numbers so that we would not have to learn how to paint...and the player piano so we would not have to learn to play the piano. Yet I hope that we will listen to Paul as he concludes this section of his letter. He reminds us that the Difficult Button is good news and that we ought to be telling others about how they too can push it as well. He does so because by pushing the difficult button, anyone, any human being can become part of God's in-breaking kingdom of love, grace and compassion. Anyone can find themselves drawn closer to the creator and

redeemer of the world. Anyone can rediscover the fullness of what it means to be a child of God. It will not be easy, but it will be worthwhile. My challenge to each of us then is to ask, am I willing to push the difficult button and live as a child of God's Kingdom by showing the love and grace of Jesus Christ to all that I meet?