

# Episode 126

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*But the people of Israel, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded. Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law instead of by trusting in him. They stumbled over the great rock in their path.*

- Romans 9:31-32

A few years ago, I had the privilege of touring through Israel. The amazing thing that happens is that your imagination is recalibrated as Sunday school pictures make way for the raw and rugged reality of the promised land.

One picture left a lasting impression on me. We were on our way to see the place where it is believed the angels appeared to the shepherds, announcing the good news of great joy that a saviour had been born. Unlike the undulating greenery I had expected, we walked through dusty fields strewn with rocks to a cave where shepherds have sheltered at night for centuries. As much as my mind was short-circuiting, my heart was too, but this had nothing to do with the scenery.

Walking up that hill with the tour guide, I turned to him and asked if he ever got tired of the awe and wonder of the work of God among his people. Expecting the usual over-the-top tour guide type response, I was floored by the look on his face. Nothing he had been showing us for the past few days carried any weight in his life. Although he came highly recommended by RT Kendal, this Jewish man was not a believer, not even a religious Jew, and certainly not captivated by the awe and wonder of the work of God among his people.

I cannot tell you how many times I have thought of those few seconds with him. Here before him was the most remarkable story of redemption, the historical evidence of the biblical accounts, and millions of people whose lives have been rescued and redeemed by the one he spent his days talking about. But in his own life, there wasn't even a ripple of recognition.

To spend his days walking the streets where Jesus carried his cross, taking time to point out the skull-like rock feature scripture calls Golgotha, the place where Jesus was crucified, and to know he stood unaffected in the empty tomb, left me filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief, just as it did Paul. God revealed his glory to his people. He made a covenant with them and gave them his law. He gave them the privilege of worshipping him and receiving his wonderful promises. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are their ancestors, and Christ himself was an Israelite as far as his human nature is concerned, and yet they chose not to believe.

As hard as this is to fully grasp, I see this unbelief alive in me too. The people of Israel and Pretoria, who try so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeed. Why not? Because we are trying to get right with God by keeping the law instead of by trusting in him. We stumble over the great rock in our path. It is the rock of performance, and it blocks our way to the promise that only if you declare with your mouth, that "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, will you be saved.

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