

God's Grace to Miserable Mankind

Romans 3:21-26

January 21, 2024

It is wonderful to be back again this morning with you all. Last week we would begin two-part miniseries looking at the sinfulness of man and the righteousness of God. This morning is what we'll get to out of Romans chapter 3. So, if you're not there, go ahead and turn with me to Romans chapter 3. And last week, we looked at verses 9 to 20, which was Paul's picture of miserable mankind.

And Paul painted a portrait using different verses from the Psalter, one from Isaiah, and he compiled those to help us understand how God sees us, apart from Christ. It's how he sees us enslaved to sin, spiritually. And so, just by way of introduction, I want to read that portion of Scripture again, as we enter into the next section.

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But read with me, Romans 3:10-20, "As it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God.' 'All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.' 'Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.' 'The venom of asp's is under their lips.' 'Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.' 'Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.' 'There is no fear of God before their eyes.'"

Here, in these verses, Paul paints a very unflattering picture of mankind. But regardless of how we see mankind or how we see ourselves, we have to trust that what the Lord has said is true here, of every man, in his spiritual condition. Even if we see the world differently, we don't see the heart of every man as God does. We see, on the outside, people who are restrained in their sin; not as bad as they would be without the government, the sword to punish.

If there was no sword to punish, crime would be much worse. We see man restrained in his sinfulness by family values, though

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this is greatly diminished with the destruction of the nuclear family, we're watching around us. We see sin restrained by the Church, though this is quickly eroding, as well, in influence.

But we don't see the majority of people as, this bad, because they are restrained outwardly, by fear of man, life circumstances, but their hearts resemble this completely. And each unbeliever would resemble this completely, outwardly, as well; were God to remove all restraint, because this is, what is in their heart. But we rejoice because this monster of a man that Paul depicts here, it would have been, each and every one of us, had he not saved us.

And so we rejoice that the Lord saw fit to save us from ourselves, from living this life of ruin and misery. But Paul goes on to say in verses 19 and 20 that the law, when it speaks, it only reveals another way, that man has violated God's holy character. The more laws that God reveals, the more knowledge of sin that weighs on the conscience, thus the law doesn't declare anyone righteous.

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It doesn't justify anyone, because no one lives up to, not even one of, God's laws. It only reveals how far short we have fallen. The law, it stops people's mouth, reveals to them God's holy standard, that he's going to hold them accountable to. And no matter what our relative standard of morality is, the standard of God's righteousness, that God holds people to, is the perfect law of his perfect character.

So, the law, there is no hope of us being saved by the law. And as we finished verse 20, it leaves us with a bit of a sense of hopelessness. If every man is guilty before God, and we could never follow his law to become righteous, if there's nothing that we can do, then how can we be saved?

And Paul, he doesn't leave anyone on a cliffhanger. He immediately answers this question, in the next verses, with the hope of the gospel. But the good news, the hope of the gospel isn't good, if you don't understand how bad you are. How ugly you are before God. And so, as we come to Romans 3:21, this is one of those glorious, but God statements, in Scripture, in the

dark backdrop of our sinfulness; how far short we fall from God's righteousness.

Paul gives us hope here, so let's read our passage for this morning, verses 21 to 26, Paul says, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifest apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

"For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus Christ."

So, the portrait that Paul painted in the previous verses, was man's lack of righteousness, his sinfulness. But now he gives us hope, and describes how one can obtain the righteousness needed

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to be saved, to be declared righteous before God. That's what Paul tells us in this passage. And so I've broken this down into eight points for this morning.

Eight points and they all start with righteousness is. Righteousness is, and then I'll give you the eight points. If I repeated the 'righteousness is' part, it'd be way too cumbersome and lose people. So righteousness is point number one: Found in God; apart from the law, number two, and number three, rooted in revelation; number four, acquired through faith; number five, offered to all; number six, given by grace; number seven, accomplished by atonement; and number eight, demonstrated in justice.

So righteousness is found in God. It's apart from the law. It's rooted in revelation. It's acquired through faith, it's offered to all, given by grace, accomplished by atonement, and it's demonstrated in justice. So, I'll repeat those, as we go, just to help you; if you're trying to take notes, and write them down to, to, keep them all in order, but also, just a framework for us, as we think.

Let's start with the first point: Righteousness is found in God. This is just the first part of verse 21, "But now the righteousness of God." So, in light of our lack of righteousness, our sinfulness, Paul says, "But the righteousness of God," and in light of the picture that Paul just painted, I think it would be beneficial to, similarly, look at a portrait of God's righteousness from Scripture.

If this is the way man, God sees man and his sinfulness, It'd be helpful to look at a Scriptural portrait of God's righteousness. But there really isn't just a singular text to turn to, like we have, here, to paint a picture of it. And so, just as Paul spliced together a bunch of Old Testament Psalms and a text from Isaiah, I thought I would comb through the Psalms and put together several verses, just to paint a contrasting picture of God's righteousness.

And so, I have line for line, 14 lines put together some verses taken from the Psalter, slightly modifying pronouns, so it makes sense to read to you, to contrast God's righteousness versus the

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sinfulness of man, we see on the pages here. I'll mention these verse references, at some point, but if there's fourteen of them; so if you want them, come get them from me, after the service. I'd let you take a picture of my notes.

So, the contrasting picture of God's righteousness would be this: "The Lord is righteous all together," Psalm 11:17. "His understanding is beyond measure," Psalm 147:5. "The Lord is worthy to be praised," Psalm 18:3. "He is clothed with splendor and majesty," Psalm 104:1. "And truly God is good," Psalm 73:1. "And does good to all," Psalm 119:68. "The Lord is a fountain of life," Psalm 36:9. "And the words of the Lord are pure," Psalm 12:6. "His promises give life," Psalm 119:50.

"And the voice of the Lord is full of majesty," Psalm 29:4. "He is slow to anger," Psalm 86:15. "And all the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness," Psalm 25:10. "From him flows peace like a river," Isaiah 48:18. "And he is a God greatly to be feared and awesome above all," Psalm 98:7.

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So, the Lord is righteous all together, though as you look at, you just look at Romans 10-18, I'm going to walk through these and just contrast them. "Though the Lord is righteous all together," though man, there is "not one who is righteous." His understanding is beyond measure," though "there's no man who understands." "And while the Lord is worthy to be praised," worthy to be sought after, "no one seeks for him."

"He is clothed with splendor and majesty," no one of greater worth, and yet "all men turn aside" from the only thing of value, "and become worthless." "Truly God is good and does good to all," and among men, "there is no one who does good, not even one." And while of mankind, "their throat is an open grave," their throat is like, "an opening grave that has death and decay coming forth." "The Lord is a fountain of life.

And while "men use their tongues to deceive," "the words of the Lord are pure," and though "man has the venom of asp's under his lips," the words he speaks are, "like a biting and devouring snake," killing people. God's promises give life, "His words give life," and while mankind, "their mouth is full of curses

and bitterness." The words that come forth from God, "His voice is full of majesty," and while "man is quick to shed blood," and "The Lord is slow to anger."

And while "The path of man is ruin and misery," "all the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness. And in God is "peace that flows like a river," but with man, they know nothing of peace, "The way of peace they have not known." And though God is, "a God greatly to be feared and awesome, above all," "There is no fear of God before the eyes of men."

So, the Psalms paint an awesome picture of God and his character, just as they paint the true character of man. There were many more texts I had to cut, just because I wanted to keep it line for line, but I could go on from this Psalter with so many verses. They're replete with images of God's righteousness. But the revelation of God's righteousness, as we're told in Scripture, was most clearly seen in the person of Jesus Christ.

John wrote in his first epistle in 1 John 1:4, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with

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our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—" that is Jesus Christ,

"The life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testified to it, and proclaimed to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us- that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete."

Paul is writing this very same thing, here, to declare the Gospel of Jesus Christ and his righteousness; the righteousness that was manifest in Jesus Christ, that would be evident for all to see. A stark contrast to men's sinfulness is the righteousness of God: The righteousness of Jesus Christ. In Christ was the righteousness of God most clearly on display, and we don't have the time, at all, to look through the Gospels to see that.

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But that's the point Paul is making here, on the picture of God's righteousness that, from the Psalms that I gathered together, it's nothing but a verbal picture of Jesus Christ, from the Psalms. True righteousness is found, in God alone, and it's made known to us, expressly, in the God man, Jesus Christ.

So, righteousness is found in God and it's not found in anyone else. But that brings us to point two: Righteousness is apart from the law. Look at the second part of verse 21, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law." Righteousness has been made known apart from the law, in Jesus Christ, revealing that righteousness is found in God alone, which means, we cannot detain a standard of righteousness by following the law ourselves.

And the fact that you can obtain divine righteousness, apart from the law, is a wonderful and glorious truth, after we just looked at the sinfulness of man compared to his perfect standard of righteousness. But the fact that righteousness comes apart from the law, came as a huge shock to the Jews, because many thought they could attain righteousness by following the law.

They thought that's why God gave them the law, so they could walk righteously and be declared righteous before him, by following the law. And every world religion is built on the premise that you can earn your way to paradise, or a better life, or heaven. Some kind of perfection, is all based on your outward actions. The world hates the picture of man, that the Scriptures paint, that Paul painted here.

The world and every man tells himself the exact opposite; that he can, in fact, be better, and do better, and earn his own way there, just by trying harder. But true righteousness is found in God alone, and it is obtained apart from obedience to the law.

And while this might have seemed like a novel thing or a new idea to the Jews, Paul explains, that this is, and this is point number three: It is rooted in revelation, "But now the righteousness of God has been manifest apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it-" they bear witness to this righteousness, "the righteousness of God."

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Paul says the entirety of the Law and the Prophets bear witness to the fact that man is not saved by following the law. It wasn't that the law failed, and God had to find another way to save men, when they couldn't follow the Ten Commandments perfectly. The entirety of the Old Testament holds up God's righteousness, bears witness to it. That reveals our sinfulness, in comparison and our need for a Savior.

This isn't something new. MacArthur says in his commentary, he says, "The Law and the Prophets did not show men how to achieve their own righteousness, but pointed to the coming Messiah, the Savior and Son of God, who himself would *provide* the righteousness that God demands of men."

It was the Jews who misunderstood. They thought the Messiah was going to come to deliver them physically, and that they would deliver themselves, spiritually, by following the law. When in reality was the other way around. The Messiah would come to deliver them spiritually, save them from their sins, because they needed a righteousness that they could not obtain themselves.

But because of the deceitfulness of man's own hearts, the Jews became convinced that they could meet the standard of God's righteousness by obeying the law. Some were so proud to think that they could come up with more laws to build fences around the laws of God, so that they would stay away from breaking God's law. All the while, though, they were transgressing the commands in their hearts, though convincing them, they were obeying them outwardly. They were disobedient in their hearts.

And this is exactly what Jesus comes on the scene and says, in his Sermon on the Mount, he says, "You have heard it said do not murder, but I tell you, even if you're angry with someone, you have committed murder in your heart." Jesus came on the scene and began exposing that, perfect obedience to the law is not just external, but as a matter of obedience, even in the heart. Not just obedience of the will outwardly, but obedience in the thought life, and the emotions, the affections of the heart.

If you could obey the law of God fully, and immediately, externally, but not with joy and love for God, you're still not obeying the law. You have sinned. Jesus says, as he continued,

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he then declared to people, in the Sermon on the Mount, what God requires of them, from their heart, he says, "You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

That was the death blow to the Pharisees, the religious leaders of Jesus day, for who can be perfect, as God is perfect. And that's the death blow to any of us who thinks ourselves pretty good. Who thinks that he can earn his way to heaven, be good enough to get to heaven. If you aren't perfect, as God is perfect, not compared to other men, but compared to God; if you are not as perfect, as he is perfect, you will be condemned. That was Jesus's point, to deal a death blow to their self-righteousness.

Jesus Point was, no one is perfect, as God is perfect. We all know that. We all know we've stumbled even in the smallest degree, which means we are deserving of eternal punishment. Thus, we praise God for Jesus Christ, the righteous one. But if one is not made righteous by obeying the law, and this is replete in Old Testament prophecies, we don't have, again, don't have time to look at all of those in the Old Testament. But if

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one is not made righteous by obeying the law, then how? And Paul answers that question in the next verse.

He says righteousness is acquired not by keeping the law. It is acquired apart from the law through faith. Point number four: Acquired through faith. Look at verse 22, "The righteousness of God," and we might insert, 'is acquired through faith in Jesus Christ.' Through, is a preposition, marking instrumentality, that is marking an instrument that accomplishes what is spoken of. That is to say, this marks the instrument that saves us, which is faith, not the law. Not anything we do, but faith.

Paul said in Romans 3:20, just previously, to this recognition of sin comes through the law, but salvation comes through faith. Faith is the state of believing something, on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted in. So those who have faith are in a state of believing and trusting in the reliability of the one trusted in.

In this case, that is Jesus Christ, God himself. He is entirely reliable. Therefore, he is worthy of all of our trust. This

belief, it begins with trusting, as we've already talked about, in the righteousness of God, that God alone is righteous. Jesus is God therefore, Jesus has this righteousness within himself.

But it starts here, trusting and believing in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. So, it starts here, but Paul goes on to lay out several other truths about obtaining this necessary righteousness. But faith in Jesus Christ begins with believing that he is God and that he is righteous, as God, that he is good and perfect in every way. But this belief, it isn't just an intellectual belief. "The demons even believe and Shudder."

Not just intellectual, but saving faith, penetrates to the deepest recesses of the heart, which includes the intellect, the thinking mechanism of our heart; the thinking, the emotions, and the will; thoughts, emotions and the will. Saving faith penetrates into all of those areas of our heart. It penetrates into our thoughts. It penetrates into our emotions. It penetrates into our will. One commentator said, "No one can think his way into heaven, but neither can he receive Jesus

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Christ, as Lord and Savior, without some comprehension of the truth of the gospel.”

There are many who claim to be Christians. If you have ever gone out with Red Team or just out evangelizing yourself, in Greeley, and running into people, there are many people who call themselves Christians. And when you ask them: Well what, what is the gospel? Can you tell me what the gospel is? They just look at you like you're from Mars. And some of these people, they talk about churches, that they attend.

These are people who go to church, claim to be Christian, and yet there's no understanding of the gospel, within them. They use the term, they will say they believe it, but they don't actually have an understanding of it, intellectually. Now I know everyone's understanding of the gospel varies, and I know some have a weak understanding of the gospel, and yet they are saved. But you do have to have an understanding of it to be saved. And if you have an understanding, you'll be able to reiterate it to some degree. So it's a good test for us.

Can we explain the gospel to somebody else? If we can't, it might be, because we don't understand it ourselves. So, it is intellectual. We don't want to discount that. It is intellectual. And someone cannot be saved without the facts of man's sinfulness and God's righteousness. But it is not merely intellectual. Faith and confidence in Jesus Christ goes beyond facts and comprehension, and it penetrates even to the emotions.

Again, one commentator writes, he says, and I quote, "A person cannot be saved by good feelings about Christ. And many people throughout the ages, and in our own day, have substituted good feelings about Christ for saving faith in him. But on the other hand, a person whose life is transformed by Christ will be affected in his emotions, in the deepest possible way."

So, this deep emotional affection; by this, we were referring to a love for God, a joy for God, an excitement for God; for his Word, for his truth. And such a love for God, for his Word, for his truth, it overflows; and a love for others, that they hear his Word and his truth, that has changed us. And this is where

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the religious Jews and religious Christians of our day are found woefully wanting.

For the Jews of their day, of Jesus day, they were outwardly righteous in many ways, believing the facts, claiming to believe the facts of Scripture. But their belief, it was proved to be, in themselves; when their so-called love for the law worked itself out in devouring widows houses and livelihoods, to increase their own estate.

If you've, were here for Travis's recent sermons in Luke, this is what we were looking at, these religious leaders devouring widows, just to lift themselves up. If they devoured widows, how could they claim to love God and his law? They couldn't. Their joy was not in God, it was in making long prayers, publicly, so that people noticed them. That's where their emotions were directed. Not Godward, but to please the self. Their joy was not in God, but in the fleeting riches of this world and gaining prominence before men.

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True faith and belief in Jesus finds its greatest joy and satisfaction in God and obeying his Word. Is this true of you? Have your affections really been changed by the gospel? Is what Jesus wants in his Word, the evangelism of the world, the discipleship, the local church? Is that what you want the most? Or are you in the secret recesses of your heart, doing all the things that you do, for the approval of men, or for the increase of your own estate?

True faith deeply changes one's affections. And finally, true faith in Jesus, is made manifest, as it affects the will, the thinking, the emotions, and the will. This is the aspect of our hearts and our minds, that move us to obey. True faith is exemplified by obedience to God and his Word.

Have you been telling yourself you love God and find your greatest joy in him? But there's really no obedience overflowing out of your heart, in real life. Well, friend, if there's no obedience, there's no victory over sin. You really should examine yourself. If you find that you really don't trust in

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this way, confess that to the Lord, repent and believe with your whole heart and not just your mind.

So you don't have saving faith without some comprehension of the gospel. But even if you have some comprehension of the gospel, that isn't enough alone. Your emotions, your affections, must be changed from the inside out. What you want, and this will produce different actions. James tells us, 'we do what we do, because we want what we want.' If someone is doing something, they're doing it because that's really what they want.

We can't deceive ourselves and say, I really want to obey, but never obey. And we can't make excuses for other people who claim to be Christians and say, well, I know they really want to obey the Lord, they just aren't. Well, those two things are incompatible. James tells us what we really want, that is what we do. We might need to repent of wanting to sin, but that is what we really want.

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The gospel, it changes our deepest affections, what we want, so that our lives reflect that in our obedience. So true faith in Jesus Christ, it penetrates to the depths of the heart, affecting the intellect, the emotions, and the will. But putting one's trust and confidence, belief in Jesus Christ's perfect righteousness, as revealed in the Law and the Prophets, it is this simple faith, that takes hold of salvation in Christ's righteousness.

Simple faith, simple belief, is how we obtain salvation, not some outward action, not performing some way. And God also tells us, that this faith is a gift from him. Jesus tells us in John 3, that we "must be born again." We don't affect our being born again by believing. God regenerates our hearts, and then we believe, it's a gift from him.

But salvation is found in the simple belief, putting all of our confidence in Jesus Christ, the one who is worthy of all our trust. And Paul then tells us who this salvation is for. Is it for the rich? Is it for the powerful? Is it for those of status,

those of prominence, special character, for the Jews? Pagans?
Who's it for?

And Paul then says, and this is point five: Righteousness is offered to all. Look at the second-half of verse 22, "For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Christ's righteousness, which provides salvation, is for all, without distinction, for all who believe.

So really, even the worst among us, all they have to do is believe this? Sounds too good to be true, but that is the point of the gospel. We have nothing to offer, yet we are offered a full pardon by God. We are offered to receive his perfect righteousness, leading to salvation. The point is, we are all of us, poor, pitiable, blind, and naked, with nothing commendable in us. And if we believe we will be saved, we will be saved.

That's the most unfair deal in the universe. Christ took all our punishment and we get all of his sonship righteousness. It's the most unfair deal in all the universe, but God offers it to all.

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Anyone can turn from his sins and be saved, no matter his status in life or even his practical level of wickedness.

Even the most wicked person can be saved. And the righteous response to this, and this is how we were all saved, is to fall on our knees and plead the blood of Christ, repent of our sins, put all our confidence in Christ and his righteousness. I know many of you have responded to the gospel in this way, but there are also some wrong responses to this offer of salvation.

Pride can lead to a few different wrong responses. This offer of Christ's righteousness could lead you to the proud response of, I don't really believe what Paul says in Romans 10 to 18, here about me, because I think I'm a pretty good person. I think I'll go on my own and, and, see how I, see how I fare in the end.

That's one proud response to not really believe what God says about how bad we are before God. If you think that, you need to go back and listen to my sermon last week, because it is an ugly picture. That is how God sees you. But a second proud response

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is to think, well surely, you know, anyone who believes, it doesn't mean this person over here, that I really don't like. That person there is beyond saving. They've done some really, really bad things.

Or we can also be proud, along the same vein of thinking and say, God, I, I, am too bad for God to save; God could never really forgive me. But ca, Paul goes on to dispel any proud thought, when he says, "For there is no distinction." You are no better, and you are no worse than any other man around you. He, he, reiterates this when he says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

There are no distinctions. You're no better, and you're no worse than anyone else in God's eyes, a a fallen human being. You are the murderous, ruinous, miserable man from verses 10 to 18, just like the rest of us, and no one is beyond saving. And if you still think, look I've done some really bad things. what's the worst thing that you could possibly think of, that you could do, that would be unforgivable?

What would be the worst thing you could do? I would say killing the son of God would be pretty high on the list, don't you? But turn back with me just a, a, few pages to Acts chapter 2, the, the, book, just to the left of Romans. And Acts 2 records the coming of the Holy Spirit. And afterwards Peter gets up and he preaches to, in Jerusalem, to the crowds with the other disciples standing there with him.

And he proclaims this same message of salvation to the crowds of people, who had just several weeks prior to this, chanted with the religious leaders, crucify him. So, Acts chapter 2, we'll just pick it up in verse 22, and I might skip some, I might read just down through 42.

But beginning in Acts 2, verse 22, Peter says, "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

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"God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him, 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; and my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your holy ones see corruption.

"You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'" And Peter goes on, and he says, "'Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God has sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.

"This Jesus God raised up, and of that' [we are witnesses] 'we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy

Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'"

"Let all the House of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." And Peter, he goes on, he doesn't go on to condemn them and tell them they've committed the worst sin and that they're hopeless. But he says, "Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'

"And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are far off," that's us, "everyone whom the Lord calls to himself. And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, 'save yourselves from this crooked

generation.' So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls."

So, if God's offer of salvation was offered to those, just weeks after they put Jesus Christ to death, Peter says, "Repent, be baptized, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, his death, resurrection." Now there's no distinction between me and you, and dear friend, there's hope for you. There is no one beyond saving.

Christ's righteousness is for all who would believe. There is no distinction. There's no one who's done anything beyond forgiveness. No one's more guilty than another man. No one's more guilty than those who shed the blood of Christ. We are all swift to shed blood in our hearts. Paul says we've all fallen short of his glory, his holy character.

He is righteous all together, but no man is righteous. There's no distinction among us. Thus, salvation is offered to all. So we've seen that righteousness is found in God alone. It is attained apart from the law. It is rooted in revelation. It is

acquired through faith. It is offered to all sinners who will obey, or who will believe, regardless of any station in life, status, or any other factor.

And six, point number six, Paul tells us: Righteousness is given by grace. One commentator says, this, this, Greek word here used as, *dikaioō*. Justified, means to declare, the righteous, the rightness of something or someone. Justified means to declare the rightness of something or someone. Justification is God's declaration that all the demands of the law are fulfilled, on behalf of the believing sinner, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Justification is a holy, forensic, or legal transaction. It changes the judicial standing of the sinner before God. In justification, God imputes the perfect righteousness of Christ to the believer's account and then declares the redeemed one fully righteous. This is a full pardon of sin, full forgiveness for all of our sin, but much more than that, he declares us actively, just and right.

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That is fully fulfilling the legal requirements of the law. He declares that we've obeyed the law perfectly. Not just forgiven and our slate wiped clean, for us to mess it up again, but we've been forgiven now and forever. And we've, also, been given the righteousness of God. For the one who has been forgiven, look at, you know, again, that picture in 3 to 18. No longer does he see you as the murderous, miserable man. Instead, he declares you altogether righteous, as he is righteous, because he has given you, his righteousness.

This is the reality in the beauty of Colossians 3:3, in which Paul says, about our former life, the man in verses 10 to 18 there, "our life is hidden in Christ." If you take that picture, I painted of Christ's righteousness, from all the Psalms, God's righteousness, you take this picture that Paul paints of us and you cover it up with the righteousness of God. And you say, that's how God, now, sees me.

Your life is hidden in Christ. All the bad things you've done, they've been forgiven and you've been hidden in Christ, and that's how God sees you. He declares you righteous, as Jesus is

righteous. But for what cost does he do this? It is a free gift. The next word in Greek is an adverb, which the ESV translates, as a gift. But it's an adverb, properly translated as, freely; God freely justifies. It costs us nothing, nor could it.

Now this is most glorifying to God, because we give nothing to God for our salvation, which means he receives all the glory. We have nothing to give. But even if we did, it would take away his glory. If you're following along in the church's Bible reading plan, you've recently read the account of Abraham going to save Lot and the rest of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, who'd been taken captive.

And after Abraham rescued them, he took nothing from the people as a reward, because God told Abraham, don't accept anything from them, lest they give you even a penny and say, we have made Abraham rich. If we contributed even a dust particle's worth in our own salvation, we would have reason to boast, and we would only add to God's riches, which is impossible.

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Thus, this righteousness of Christ, given by grace, as a free gift, and we are freely justified, because of God's unmerited favor. We did nothing to earn it, and the glorious truth of that is, it means there's nothing we can do to lose it, cause there's nothing, we did to earn it. He freely declares all those who believe, as righteous. He declares them standing rightly before God, upright, perfect as he is perfect, though they've done nothing to earn it.

But the question arises then, 'How can a just God declare this man?' If you look at the man in 10 to 18, how can God declare that man righteous, and good, and perfect? This man is vile. He's a murderer. He's a liar. He brings nothing, but destruction and misery, and his heart is wicked to the core. How can this murderous man be declared right and God still be just?

If someone broke into your house, they killed the rest of your family members. He was caught. He stood trial, even after confessing. What if the judge declared him righteous and let him go? That's not justice. Justice demands a payment. Well, that's

exactly where Paul goes next. You see, salvation is freely given, but it's not accomplished without a cost.

Point number seven: Righteousness is accomplished by atonement, [so] or "justified by his grace, as a gift, through [of] the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith." Redemption refers to the release of a captive condition, that can refer to buying back a slave, but it's making one free by payment of a ransom.

Salvation is freely given, but it was accomplished at the cost of the son of God's life. Jesus Christ, by his blood, bought us back from slavery to sin, gave us new life, and declared us righteous. What's interesting and amazing to think about, is the ransom that was paid by Jesus Christ. It wasn't a payment that was owed to Satan, or to death, or to sheol. It was the payment that God required for sinners to be justified.

The sinner's debt was against God. Sin was the slave master, but God was the one to whom the debt was owed. So the payment

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was to pay the sinner's debt to God. God paid himself for the sinner's debt. An amazing reality. I mean, if someone owes you \$1,000,000 and you want to forgive their debt, are you going to go out and earn \$1,000,000 to pay yourself back? No, you're just going to forgive the debt.

So why doesn't God just do that here and just forgive sin? Well, it's because there's more than money at stake. Justice demands that sin be paid for. Christ's righteousness is at stake. Wrongdoing must be punished, if God remains righteous, that's what it means to be just. So God, he can't just willy nilly forgive and forget sin, that would obliterate his righteousness. And we know that he is righteous altogether.

We know that his holy character demands payment for sin. Sin must have its due penalty, in the wrath of God, which is why, God put forward Christ Jesus, as a propitiation, by his blood. Propitiation is a big word that means to satisfy. In Greek literature, and particularly in the writings of Homer, it is always used to refer to the acts of appeasing the gods.

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The basic idea behind the religious use of propitiate, in the Greek world, it's the humans effort, to turn to oneself, the favor of the gods, which would then give one influence in the awful and frequently calamitous powers, that they held. It was also to strengthen one's own actions by the assistance of supernatural forces. So, in the Greek world, if you wanted the gods to be nice to you or do something bad to the people you didn't like, you offered up some kind of propitiation, a sacrifice, something you thought they wanted.

Some cultists, well they would just start cutting themselves to pieces, thinking that that would gain them favor with their God. But the debt that sinful man owes is not satisfied. It's not expiated or expunged with any tangible sacrifice or amount of earthly treasure. Man has sinned against an infinitely holy God, of perfect righteousness. There is nothing we can give to propitiate him.

We were created in his image, as moral creatures, who use our freedom to do wickedness. This is a sin of infinite proportion, because it is, as a sin against the God who created us, in his

image. Thus, we have offended his infinite holiness, and the only payment acceptable, is one of infinite holiness and righteousness.

Which is why none of us can pay it. Which is why all men who die without Christ, will suffer for eternity, because the debt will never be paid. The debt is infinite; thus the punishment will be eternal. But God, in his infinite mercy put forth Jesus Christ, the perfect righteous God man, who was made like us, in our humanity, who could take our place, as a man, but was, also, of infinite worth, in his divine essence.

God put him forth, to satisfy his own wrath, by taking our place on the cross, bearing all of the wrath of God for us, that he might be glorified and save sinners. And Paul reminds us, at this point again, that this is not earned, not received by anything, but faith. It is received by faith alone; believing, putting all of our confidence and trust in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, and his substitutionary sacrifice on the cross, in our place. That's the only way to receive Christ's righteousness.

And if we receive such a truth in faith, we will be declared righteous, as he is righteous. And that brings us to our eighth and final point: Righteousness is demonstrated in justice. Look at 25, "Whom God put forward as propitiation by his blood to be received by faith. This was to show" or demonstrate, "God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

"It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be the just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Why did God put forth Jesus, as a substitutionary sacrifice, to shed his blood? Because it put on display, it demonstrated for the entire world to see, his righteousness, to magnify the righteousness of God, put God's righteousness on display.

Would God be glorified, if he didn't pass over sins and he just punished everybody for their sins, immediately? Yeah, he would be glorified in, in, his justice, executing justis, justice, because it is right to punish sin. But as he passed over sin,

delayed punishment, it was to put his righteousness on display, his perfect character on display, not only in justice, but also in mercy.

He is glorified more, not only as the just judge, but as a judge who mercifully saves those who believe and trust in his propitiatory sacrifice. He's glorified all the more, as the judge, who mercifully sent his own son to pay the penalty for the sinner. Thus, he is glorified.

His righteousness is on display, all the more, not just as judge, but as the merciful justifier of sinners. His perfect character, his glory, is on display in the cross, where mercy and justice meet, for the son of God shed his blood, for the joy set before him, to put on display God's glory, as he redeemed a people for himself.

When we consider the picture of man that Paul painted in the darkness of sin, [what we], where the light of the gospel shines ever bright. And when we consider the righteousness is found in God alone, apart from our obedience to the law, that is acquired

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by faith, that it is offered to someone as wicked as me, it is offered to all, when we consider, that it is given freely by his grace, but accomplished through the costly blood, of his son's atonement.

When we consider that [goss] God is the just judge, but also our justifier, mercifully declaring us righteous, because of what his son has done. When we consider these things, we must ask only one question, and it is the question that Paul asks, in the very next verse. What then becomes of our boasting?

It is excluded. At this point, any boasting is eradicated from our hearts and replaced with an exuberant joy for our savior, who took our place, suffered, and bled, and died for us. Our only boast, is in the Lord Jesus Christ. What he has done for us, rejoicing in the salvation he has purchased for us. Which is exactly what we're going to remember, in the communion ordinance, in just a few minutes. But first, just bow with me for a word of prayer.

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Father, I pray that as your righteousness, your character, is on display, abundantly in the pages of Scripture, but in particularly here in just these six verses. As your righteousness is on display, with the backdrop of our sinfulness. And I just pray that, if there is someone here who does not yet know you, that you would penetrate their hearts with the truths of their sinfulness and your righteousness. That you are righteous, all together, and they are not righteous at all, not good at all. They are murderous in their hearts.

They're devouring with their tongue. Ruin and misery is all around them. We pray that they would see themselves, as you see them, and that they would turn to the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and put their faith and trust in you, in your atoning sacrifice on the cross. That they would, seev, receive righteous robes, to walk in righteousness before you.

And Lord, I pray for all of us, who do believe. And we rejoice that, 'this is us.' The, the, ugly man on the pages of Scripture, in 10 to 20, 'that was us.' But now we are robed in your righteousness. We are hidden in your life. That there is no

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greater joy in this life, than to dwell on that reality, to remember what you have done.

But though we do not pay anything for our salvation. Though we offer nothing. We give nothing. You gave everything. You gave your life for us. You shed your blood for us, that it was infinitely costly. And I pray that this just brings us joy, as we celebrate this anew, with one another. As we remember what you have done for us, and proclaim your death, until you return. We pray this, in Jesus' name. Amen.