

Romans 3:19-26

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[0 : 00] Father God, I praise you for making a wretch such as I, your treasure. And I thank you, Father, that you accomplish this through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

! And so I pray, God, that you come, that you work deep works in our souls this morning. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. First, I want to say, I apologize for the very fragmented way I've taken you through chapter 3 as I've been here and then not been here and then had things laid on my heart that were different.

And I promise, at least Lord willing, that next week we'll finish chapter 3 and let Chris get started on chapter 4. But I'm really blessed to come to this text today.

It's what I will call the crux of the Bible. And in case you don't know what a crux is, I've got to tell you a little bit of my background. In my younger days, not too long ago, I did quite a bit of rock climbing.

[1 : 23] It was actually kind of a consuming passion for me. And in rock climbing, you're setting always new challenges for yourself. It's a fairly independent sport. And you're always wanting to climb new routes, new routes.

And in every route, you have a guidebook and you look at it and you know the rating. You know, this is a little harder than what I've done before. This has particular moves on it that will be a challenge to me. And you get what's called beta.

You ask other people who have climbed it, what are the challenges of this climb? What do I need to be doing to prepare myself to accomplish this task? I had a climbing wall, a little climbing wall in my room. And I would actually set up the moves that I knew I was going to have to do and practice them over and over and over again to be able to accomplish this climb.

But every climb always had a crux. The most difficult part. The part that if you could get it down, if you could do that part, you could do the rest of the climb.

And every part of the climb, everything leading up to that spot was about getting to that spot. Being able to conserve your energy, have the strength you needed left to pull off those couple of very difficult moves.

[2 : 31] And then beyond that, everything was just a celebration of accomplishing the most difficult part of the climb. That was the crux. This text, this is the crux of the Bible.

Martin Luther called this the central passage of all of Scripture. So we've been ascending. We've been climbing throughout our Scriptures.

We've seen God create the world and original sin. We've seen Him destroy the world except a remnant of people and animals through the flood. We've seen the Tower of Babel.

We've seen the captivity in Egypt of the Israelites, the exodus, all the plagues, the exodus. We've seen 40 years in the desert, the giving of the Mosaic Law, the temple being built.

We've seen God's people scattered and regathered. The times of the judges, the prophets. And then we see in our New Testament, the culmination of redemptive history in Christ coming and dying for the sins of His people.

[3 : 36] This text speaks of that. Paul so far in Romans has left us guilty. He starts out laying out a very careful case that all men are guilty.

We're all under just condemnation, both Gentile and Jew. He begins kind of his thesis statement in chapter 1, verse 16. He says, The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

And he goes on to show us how everyone needs to place their faith in Christ because everyone is justly condemned, those without the law and those with the law. The last passage in chapter 3, he fires off a bunch of Old Testament quotations for us.

None is righteous. No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks after God. He's not leaving us any room to think that anyone is going to escape the judgment of God.

And I think if you look around at the world, you'll find that the world knows. We all know that we're guilty. We all carry within us this sense that we haven't lived rightly, that we deserve some kind of condemnation for the way that we live.

[4 : 50] And I think we know that that doesn't just extend horizontally, but it also extends vertically. We know that it's not just that we sin against our fellow man and we should be judged by our fellow man, but that we've transgressed some kind of greater law and we deserve the wrath and judgment of God.

If you look in verse 19 and 20, I just want you to see two phrases there, that we'll be held accountable to God and that no human being will be justified in His sight.

And that's the great tragedy of sin, that we've offended God. That's the primary problem with sin. Are there other problems with sin?

Sure. Social issues as we sin against our fellow man? Absolutely. But the primary issue, the number one issue, is that we've sinned against God Himself.

Psalm 51.4, which is David's psalm of repentance after he has taken Bathsheba, had her husband killed, had a baby by her that died.

[5 : 58] He says in 51.4, Against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. He says to God, against you and you only have I sinned.

That kind of seems like an audacious claim, doesn't it? It seems that He reduces everything that He's done. He's really sinned against the entire nation of Israel as their king. He's reduced all of that to say, against you only have I sinned.

But what David understood was that this vertical access of his sin, this issue that he has with God, is greater than those things. That sin trumped all the other sin that he had done.

So we all carry this guilt around with us. In our daily living, and I think we know that someday we'll be judged. There's coming this final judgment.

And we do some things to cope with that. Look at the world around you. I'm going to give you some evidences of this. Everybody knows the guilt that they carry with them. I'm going to tell you quickly about three coping mechanisms.

[7 : 00] You can see the world carrying out. We tend to cope intellectually, physically, and religiously. We cope intellectually by trying to justify our actions, turning vices into virtues, such as greed and intimidation and self-exaltation.

Our culture is about that, about justifying sinful acts, about justifying transgression of God's law. We cope physically with the abuse of alcohol and drugs, both legal and illegal, things just to kind of numb the pain of living.

We wrap ourselves up in things like TV, social activities, and sports, to occupy our minds with other things than the guilt, just so that we won't let in that deafening sound of silence, as Simon and Garfunkel talked about.

We're afraid that if we stop for just a moment, we might hear the condemnation that's upon us. And most divisive among all of them, we cope with things with religion.

Religiously, we cope. And you see the world about this action. Because of explaining away our guilt or distracting us from it, religion tells us that we shouldn't be guilty.

[8 : 20] That if we do certain things, if we face a certain way and pray a certain number of times a day, if we're really careful about stepping on grasshoppers, if we follow a man's written code, that we're okay.

We're going to be all right. We're going to achieve a higher level of understanding, or we're not going to be judged for our actions. But none of these coping mechanisms, none of these things actually get rid of the guilt, do they?

None of them actually free us from the condemnation of God. Thankfully, the text goes on, right? Chris asked me before we started, we were singing the sheet song, and he said, are you going to preach after this?

And I said, thankfully no, but this is a really happy text, so it wouldn't be a terrible mood setting for such a text. So we all have this guilt. We know that. We have a guilt bearing down upon us prior to being saved, but thankfully we have salvation in Christ.

And that's where Paul begins to turn, and why this is the crux. If we can get this right, everybody, if we can understand the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ, how it is that that exchange happens, we're going to get the rest of it.

[9 : 29] It's all going to turn out okay. We're going to understand the rest of the book of Romans if we can get this one clear point. So let's get after it. Verses 21 through 23.

But now, and he doesn't mean now in my argument, he means now in this present age, but now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law.

What is he talking about? The righteousness of God, the right living, the perfect, holy, right living of God. Can people do good things? Absolutely. I'm not going to negate that.

People can do good philanthropic things. We saw Mother Teresa live a very sacrificial life. But if Mother Teresa didn't place her faith in Jesus Christ for his righteousness, her righteousness, the things she did, will not be enough before God.

So we can do good things apart from Christ. We can go about the activity of what the Bible tells us to do. I can share with others. I can love people. I can share the gospel with people and not be justified in his sight.

[10 : 35] So the righteousness of God, Christ himself, has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it. And I want to point out to you that he has been talking repetitively about the law lowercase in my ESV, but then here, the last part of 21, he says law uppercase and the prophets.

And what he's essentially saying is the scriptures that we have up to now. So all that ascending I was talking about, all those stories that I mentioned, all of those things, the law and the prophets, have been speaking of the righteousness of God that we find in Christ, have led us to this point. Verse 22, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. Now I'm going to get there. I'm going to go beyond what I'm about to say, but I want you to see that there is an action required on our part to have the righteousness of God.

We have responsibility in this equation. Okay? And what is that responsibility? It is belief. That we believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the only way back to God to restore our relationship with Him.

We're all under condemnation. We all carry this guilt of sin. The only way back is Jesus Christ. And faith requires our belief in Him. Our salvation is dependent on that very thing.

[12 : 04] Last part of 22, for there is no distinction. Verse 23, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Right?

This fits. This fits where He's been and where He's going. Okay? He's been talking about the Jew and the Gentile all under condemnation. All must then place their faith in Christ for their salvation. Right? There is no distinction between the two. All must place their faith because all of us have sinned and we fall short of the glory of God. All right, man, I just lost my thought.

Verse 24 and 25. 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.

All right, let me stop there. So we see that what is required of us is a belief of faith in Jesus Christ and what happens in that equation. And Paul gives us some pretty big words here. We have three rather churchy words that I think are very important for us to define.

[13 : 15] Many people take words like redemption, I'm redeemed, I'm forgiven, I'm justified. Those terms, we take them and we simply make them synonyms to say.

And in one sense, they are. But they're different lenses by which to look at our salvation. There are different ways to understand this great exchange, as Martin Luther called it, where we got the righteousness of God and he took our sin and bore the wrath of God.

Different lenses by which to look at it. So he starts out by talking about being justified. So what does it mean to be justified? And it's fairly simple, it's kind of a court term.

It means simply to be declared not guilty. It's a declaration. So you stand before the judge with your traffic ticket and you say, Judge, I actually was not speeding.

This was a false ticket. Cops crazy. He says he radared me, but he didn't. And the judge says, I believe you. You did not do the thing that you did. And you're justified in that thing.

[14 : 19] You've been forgiven of the possibility that you even had anything to do with the wrongdoing that you've been blamed for. That's justification.

So we're in a right standing if we have our faith in Christ. We're in a right standing before God. We've been justified, but how is it that we've been justified? We've been justified by his grace as a gift, a free gift given to us through redemption in Christ who was our propitiation.

So these are terms we need to understand. Redemption and propitiation. Now Paul was not trying to be super booky and smart and blow everybody in the Church of Rome's minds when the letter was read.

His intention was not that somebody stood up in front of the church and read this letter and they all said, that Paul is amazing. He uses big words that we don't even understand. Paul spoke very plain language so that people totally got what he was saying.

We just don't live in that culture. We don't really use the word redeemed. in our culture. Or certainly we don't use the term propitiation in our culture. So we have to kind of look at what was going on.

[15:31] What is the culture? What is this Greco-Roman world that they lived in? And redemption was a big deal. It was a term that they really would have taken hold of. I've explained to you before that the redemption process in war looked a little like this.

If I were to conquer another king, I would capture that king or take him back to my city and I would put a price on his head. So I would say your people, in order for your king to be redeemed, I need this much in gold.

And if you paid that price, your king was said to be redeemed and I would return him to you. So it's a picture of redemption. A price that the captor cannot pay is paid by somebody else and the captor is set free.

But it gets a little neater than that. A little deeper to the common man that lived in this time. Today, we file bankruptcy if we have to default on our loans.

We just say, I cannot pay my loans and we have a little loophole that gets us out of that. But there wasn't a loophole like that in this day. And the way they got out of debt was they either sold themselves to somebody into slavery and used the money to pay their debtor or they became slaves of that person that they owed money to.

[16:53] That was the way it worked. That was your way out. So if I borrowed a great sum of money to start a business and my business failed, I would become a slave. Unable to pay the debt, I'd have no possessions left at this point.

Me and my family as slaves. Now let's say I'm in slavery, I'm sold into slavery and I have a cousin who lives in another city who's well-to-do and hears that I have this problem.

The way that cousin would go about buying my redemption is they would go to the local pagan temple. This is so cool. They would go to the local pagan temple and they would pay the amount that I owed, my debt, they would pay my debt plus a fee to the priest at the pagan temple.

The priest then at the pagan temple would take the money owed to my slaveholder and I would be set free from that slaveholder but I would become the slave of the pagan god.

That way, culturally, I still had the shame of being a person who defaulted on my loans but because pagan gods had no real rules, I could go about my business.

[18:04] Isn't that fascinating? As Paul talks all throughout the Old Testament about us being set free but being slaves. You understand that?

If we lived in that culture, we would have really understood what was going on. We've been set free from the captivity of sin, from the dominion of the devil, but we're now slaves of a new god, the god, who causes us to live in a different way.

And that's the picture of redemption. Isn't that an amazing way to look at your salvation? Every time I think of redemption, I think I'm getting a little broken record-ish about this, but I think of the prophet Hosea who was told by God to marry a woman who he knew would be unfaithful to him.

Her name was Gomer. And the picture, this real-life charade that God carried out in Hosea's life was the picture of Israel and God.

Israel was a harlot, not faithful to God. So you see this process in the first three chapters of her continual betrayal of Hosea.

[19:16] And she gets herself to the position where she's living with another man and finds herself in such a hard financial time that she is sold into slavery. And then God tells Hosea to go to the slave market and to purchase her back.

And the amount he purchases for is a huge amount, a huge amount of money. He goes back and he purchases his bride who had betrayed him. It's a picture of redemption.

We ought to hear the word redeemed sing these songs and it ought to blow our minds. Totally without any worth of our own.

Isn't that what Paul has been saying? None of us are righteous. I don't care if you were born in Georgia. I don't care if your parents took you to the Southern Baptist Church. It doesn't matter. You could have worn a tie from the time you were six months old.

No righteousness of your own. It doesn't matter how many mission trips you've been on at all. None of that matters if you don't place your faith in Christ for your salvation.

[20 : 21] You are a poor, wretched slave. Nothing of your own. Pitiful. The slave market, slaves were put on display without any clothes on so people could see what they were buying.

That's you. You have nothing of your own to offer to God. But yet he's purchased us. And how has he purchased us? Through a propitiation.

Christ himself is our propitiation. Now here's another term that we have to understand. In this Greco-Roman world there were many gods. And if you wanted a god to favor you, to be propitious towards you, you offered a sacrifice to that god.

So if I were to sail someplace and I wanted to offer a sacrifice to the god of Neptune, I wanted the god of Neptune to shine on me to make sure that I wasn't in a terrible wreck as I was sailing, I would offer a propitiation to turn God's anger to propitiosness, towards favor toward me.

See, the Greco-gods were seen as kind of fickle. I mean, you've never read any of the Greek literature? Very fickle gods, easily angered, bickering amongst each other.

[21 : 42] And so these people understood Jesus Christ is a propitiation. We are enemies of God. Now our God is not fickle. Our God is full of wrath, full of indignation.

The law and the prophets have spoken of that all throughout the Old Testament. We've seen God's wrath and His love combined. And then we see Christ as the propitiation, this sacrifice to turn God's favor back to us.

It's a beautiful, beautiful picture. So, in the Old Testament we see the picture of the Passover, the final plague that God brought amongst Egypt to bring about the Exodus.

And what happens in the Passover? The firstborn of all the Egyptians is killed. The angel of death comes through. But those who have killed a spotless lamb and spread the blood on the doorpost of their house, the angel of death passed over.

Right? What is that a picture of? That's a picture of the wrath of God against sinful man. And those of us who are found in Christ, the perfect Passover lamb being passed over.

[22 : 57] Living as a result of such a thing. Christ is the bull slaughtered on the day of atonement. I've spoken to you about this before. In the temple, the Holy of Holies, there was a day, one day a year, the day of atonement.

And I won't get into all the particulars of it, but there was a blood sacrifice required one time a year as part of the Mosaic Law to make an atonement for all the sins of Israel.

There was a constant sacrifice happening amongst individuals, but this was the big sacrifice, the big laying of blood on the altar to atone for those sins.

And as I mentioned, Christ is the price. He's the price that Gomer paid. Hosea paid to purchase Gomer out of slavery. Last part of verse 25, verse 26.

So all this, all this activity, this was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins.

[24 : 06] Stop there for a second. This was to show God's righteousness. righteousness. This process of placing our faith in Christ, the perfect sacrifice, came in order to show us, to show us God's righteousness because in the past, he had passed over sin, hadn't he?

He had given a way out. The way was always Christ, but it was faith that God would deliver his people. Does that make sense? faith in the Old Testament.

The New Testament has not nullified the Old Testament. It was always the same. It was faith in Christ. They didn't know that. They didn't know it was Christ, but it was in the promises of God that he would deliver them that justified them in his sight.

Because he had passed over those former sins. So you see both his wrath and his love, even in the Old Testament. Verse 26. It was to show his righteousness at the present time. So in the past his righteousness, now in the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

These are some interesting words here, doesn't he? Some nice choice of words, so that he might be just. In order for God to be just, he must condemn sin.

[25 : 23] We've all transgressed the law. And no righteous judge, no earthly righteous judge, ever forgives a lawbreaker, they justly deliver the sentence due to the person, right?

You have done this thing, here's the consequence, there you go. That is a just judge. God is perfect justice, completely holy.

He's just. So how is it, what's the loophole that we've survived in if we're Christians? How is it that we're not given the condemnation due us?

Because Christ bore it for us. See that? God had to punish the sin. Every single sin you commit in your lifetime was punished in Christ.

You see that picture? He had to punish sin. I've done this also before for you. I heard this somewhere, I don't remember who, but I just want you to know this is not original to me.

[26 : 30] We all as individuals have at some point in our life stood at the bottom of a dam 10,000 miles tall and 10,000 miles wide.

And what that dam is holding back is the wrath of God against all of our sin. Can you picture that, standing at the bottom of this dam? And that dam splits open and that water comes rushing forward.

none of us would survive such a thing. That amount of water, wrath in this case. And because of what Christ has done, if you place your faith in Him, a gaping hole opens up just before you.

And all of that water goes rushing in to that gaping hole. You're standing at the edge of this hole and that wrath that should be yours, that's billowing towards you, gets swallowed up into a hole.

You remember that Jesus, before He was crucified, prayed, Father, if there's any way for this cup to pass from me, if there's any way we can do this some other way, can we please?

[27 : 35] It wasn't the Father's will. So what did He do? He drank that cup. And what was that cup? It was the wrath of God. He drank every last bit of it, He turned it over, He slammed it down, and He said, it is finished.

What a great Savior we have. Just condemnation. We deserve it. I deserve to be smashed by that wall of water, because my offense is vertical.

Right? I've sinned against you guys, certainly. Should I make reparations there? Absolutely. But more than that, I've sinned against the Holy God. I've begot God.

I've made myself Him. That is a great offense, and I deserve death. But thankfully, there's a way. There is a hole that can open if I place my faith in Christ.

There's a responsibility on my part to do so. If I ever want to see the gates of glory, if I don't want to be destroyed because of my sinfulness, I must place my faith in Christ.

[28 : 44] I must believe that He is the only way to salvation. But I want you to remember in the text, verse 24, that this grace is a gift to us.

We'll deserve it. We'll get into this next week. I don't deserve the grace of God because I believe, but it's given to me as a gift, my faith. So we see both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man working together.

I worked a homeschool conference for Truett McConnell, and I've built some new displays and one display says from the very first verse and the other display says to the very last tribe.

It's a wonderful slogan that our school is using now. And I had a homeschool mom walk by me and she said, to the very last tribe, don't you think that's a little offensive?

And I said, how so? She said, because it presumes that everybody needs Jesus. And I said, yes, that's very offensive because it's the gospel. And she went.

[29 : 45] I walked away. But that is the gospel. What she wants me to do is to say there are many ways to heaven. There's all kinds of things we can do to deal with our guilt.

We all know we're guilty. There's all kinds of stuff you can do. There's varying forms of religion and activity. For a lot of years, my religion was spending time outside. not a chance I'm going to stand at the feet of the white throne with a bunch of climbing gear and go, but look what I've been doing.

Right? Only will it be justified through the redemption of Jesus Christ because he is our propitiation. Let's pray together.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.