

How Can I Be Right With God

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Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] Friends, welcome to church this morning. We have a changed venue due to the lockdown we are in, so I'm here in the study.

But praise God, although we are perhaps feeling isolated in ways that we never have before, that we have the privilege of worshipping the one God together in the spirit through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

And so we're glad to be able to do that. Glad too that we can maintain fellowship. It's been great to hear of people's desire to connect with each other, spending time remotely together.

So again, we'll have digital tea and coffee as soon as this is finished. And don't forget to tune in again at 5.30, where we continue to think about the work of the Holy Spirit.

This morning, we're going to go back to basics. We're going to think about the good news of the cross. I guess Easter can feel really far off our radar, but we're coming towards that time where we think of Jesus' death and resurrection.

[1 : 26] So we're going to think of why the cross is good news as we worship. Now, let me read our call to worship. And we will sing from this psalm in just a few moments.

In Psalm 62, we read, My soul finds rest in God alone. My salvation comes from him.

He alone is my rock and my salvation. He is my fortress. I shall never be shaken.

This is a time to re-centre our hearts on God, to remember the good news. Now, in a moment, Kellen will lead us in singing our opening songs.

The first is a modern hymn, His Mercy is More. And then we shall sing the first eight verses of Psalm 62. What love could remember the wrongs we have done?

[2 : 59] Omniscient, all-knowing, He counts not their sum. Thrown into a sea without bottom or shore.

Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more. Praise the Lord. His mercy is more.

Stronger than darkness, new evermore. Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more.

But patience would wait as we constantly roam. What Father so tender is calling us home?

He welcomes the weakest, the vilest, the poor. Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more.

[4 : 05] Praise the Lord. His mercy is more. Stronger than darkness, new evermore.

Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more. What riches of kindness He lavished on us.

His blood, His blood, His blood, His blood was the payment, His life was the cost. We stood neath a debt we could never afford.

Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. His mercy is more.

His mercy is more. Stronger than darkness, new evermore. Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more.

[5 : 15] Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. His mercy is more. His mercy is more.

Stronger than darkness, new evermore. Our sins, they are many, His mercy is more. Stronger than darkness, new evermore.

My soul finds rest in God alone. From Him comes my salvation sure.

My safety fortress, sheltering rock. In Him alone I am secure.

How long will you assault a man? Do you all seek to lay Him low?

[6 : 38] This leaning wall, this torturing fence, And bring about His overthrown?

They plan His fall from His high place. They take delight in spreading lies.

With false and flattering mouths they bless. But in their hearts curse and despise.

Find rest, my soul, in God alone. In Him my hope is ever sure.

My safety fortress, sheltering rock. In Him alone I am secure.

[8 : 01] My honor and salvation rest. On God my rock and mighty fort.

O people, trust in Him always. To Him alone pour out your heart.

Now let's pray together. We worship you as the God who promised Himself as the place of rest and refuge to which your people can run to.

We come to you as the God who offers us mercy. Mercy each day in that you are our creator and our sustainer.

And mercy too in that you see our need. You see our brokenness. You see our sin. And you have responded in the sending of Jesus to be the answer.

[9 : 24] To be the light of the world. To be our hope and our salvation. Lord, we praise you too.

That you are a God who says we can pour out our hearts to you.

That we can be honest about how we feel. Lord, today many of us feel anxious. Many of us feel the weight of uncertainty.

Many of us are worried for families and for friends. We have concerns over our work.

And we have concerns over our finances. Lord, we want to place ourselves and those whom we love into your hands.

Trusting in your care and keeping. Lord, we ask that as your people we would know you close to us in a special way.

[10 : 27] And that your spirit would be at work in our hearts. Constantly reminding us that if our faith is in Jesus that we are children of God. And that nothing happens in our lives except that which is for your glory and for our good.

And so we pray you would strengthen us as your people. Especially be with those who feel particularly lonely. Perhaps with the isolation, those who are struggling emotionally.

Or with mental health issues. Lord, we pray your protecting and comforting hand to be with them. Lord, we thank you that we can still meet as church.

And we pray that you would use our community groups and our times of prayer together. To be a source of strength for us. As well as praising you of seeking your wisdom.

And seeking that you would do good among us and in our nation. Lord, we pray for our nation. We pray mercy for us. Lord, we again pray that you would help our leaders.

[11 : 40] Give them all the wisdom and the help that they need. Lord, we continue to pray for everybody involved in the National Health Service.

We recognize the huge challenges and burden of care that is laid on them. Lord, may they know your strength. Lord, we pray for Christians in the NHS.

That their witness, the way they do their work would be a powerful testimony to the hope that there is in Jesus. And we pray that for staff and for patients.

That it would cause people to ask, why do they have such a hope? Lord, we pray for those who are facing financial struggle and who don't know where to turn.

For those who feel their future looks bullied. May there be a great turning back to you. To have faith in you. Lord, we pray for our world at this time.

[12 : 46] As we have been turned upside down and brought to a standstill collectively. May it be a time for us to be still and to know that you are God.

May it be a time that you would, in judgment, that you would also show mercy to us. And that you would reveal the glory of Jesus to many people.

As hearts are looking for answers, may they seek and find those answers in Jesus. And Lord, we pray as we meet together, that you would teach us or remind us of the hope that we have.

And because of Jesus and his death on the cross. And we pray these things in his precious name. Amen. Now, our Bible reading this morning is from Romans chapter 3.

So if you have your Bible, we'll read Romans chapter 3 from verse 9 to verse 26. But we're going to focus on verses 21 and 22 together in just a moment.

[13 : 58] So let's hear the word of God together. What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all. We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.

As it is written, there is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away. They have together become worthless.

There is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves. Their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.

Their feet are swift to shed blood. ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law.

[15:08] Rather, through the law, we become conscious of sin. But now, a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.

He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just, and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

So let's spend some time thinking about these words. We're going to spend the next three Sunday mornings actually thinking about the cross as good news.

[16:18] Thinking about it from Romans chapter 3, verses 21 to 26. So this morning, we'll do 21, the first half of 22. And we're going to think, how is there good news here?

We are experiencing this reality that COVID-19 has brought our world to a standstill. We are all experiencing collectively isolation.

But the challenge is that brings. That there are empty streets and empty shops. And there is fear and panic in the hearts of many.

Perhaps you find yourself glued to media coverage into social media. Wondering that when will these restrictions be lifted?

Will there be a flattening of the curve? Will a vaccine be discovered? Will there be any good news? Will there be any good news?

[17:23] And into this culture of fear and anxiety? That I'm sure we all feel at different levels. I want us to deliberately, as we say, get back to basics. To think about the heart of the Bible's good news.

To get to the message of Easter. which always is and always will be good news in a broken world. So our big question today looking at verses 21 and 22 is this.

How can you and I be right with God? And that's a question that really matters. First of all because you were made for it.

Go back to the beginning of the Bible. We discover God makes a perfect world. Garden of Eden places Adam and Eve in that garden so that they might know and enjoy friendship, fellowship with God.

That's what we're made for as people in the image of God. It's a wonderful privilege. Knowing God also provides real hope today to a people starved of hope that is good news in the Bible.

[18:35] It comes from being right with God. And this question also matters. How can I be right with God? Because it doesn't just determine how I live today and now.

It also determines my eternal future. As people are beginning to consider life and how short life is, this question, how can I be right with God, matters because we're thinking about heaven and hell as eternal realities.

And the only way to enjoy perfect peace and joy is through being right with God. So we need some good news. But first, there is some bad news.

Paul, who wrote this letter from chapter 1 verse 18 all the way to chapter 3 and verse 20, hammers on one big coin. And it's this.

No one by themselves can be good enough for God. You and I by ourselves, we cannot be good enough that outside of Jesus, we are lost and we cannot find our way back to God.

[19:44] We are guilty in God's courtroom. And we read a couple of summary statements.

Romans chapter 3 and verse 9. We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.

Whatever our nationality or background, we are all alike under sin outside of Jesus. And verse 20. Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law.

Trying to keep God's law, trying to earn our way to God's acceptance does not work. And Paul, in between those summary sentences, in verses 10 to 18, he piles up evidence.

Loads of scriptures from the Old Testament, which function really as a catalogue of our sins. And so in verse 20, verse 10 rather, on our legal standing before God, the Bible is clear, there is no one righteous.

When it comes to our minds, there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. Our minds are both unable and unwilling to turn and to trust and to love and to worship God left to ourselves.

[21 : 04] Our desires are twisted and out of shape. All have turned away. They have together become worthless. There is no one who does good, not even one.

God sets the course for our life as the wise designer, creator, and we deliberately turn away from that. Our words are used to hurt and destroy.

Listen to the language. Their throats are open graves. The poison of vipers is on their lips. We spoil relationships and we fail to love others well.

Verses 14 to 16. We have mouths full of cursing and bitterness, feet swift to shed blood. Ruin and misery mark their ways.

And to cap it all. There is no fear of God before the line. Collectively, outside of Jesus, we fail and we refuse to honour and to love God.

[22 : 09] We have as people, I think, an instinct to compare and to compete. We make subjective judgments on how we are doing.

So we say, well, at least I'm not as bad as the person over there. In terms of the question, how can I be right with God? We need to compare, not against one another, but against God's perfect standard.

And as we do that, a sobering reality comes into view. That you and I, even if we were to live perfectly from this point on, we could not cover our paths.

Words, actions, motives that we know in our hearts and in our minds were wrong. Our conscience that condemns us. And we also, even in our best days, we cannot perfectly keep the love commands.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And love your neighbour as yourself. We cannot do it. And so we stand before God guilty and without any defence.

[23 : 30] Maybe some of you are already asking the question, hold on a minute. You told me this was a good news sermon. So where's the good news? Well, I just want to say sometimes hearing bad news can actually be good news.

I was thinking about cartoon races. Maybe as a kid, do you remember watching like Wacky Races or Tom and Jerry, that kind of thing? Whenever there was a race, there would always be the villain who would get ahead and they'd come to a fork in the road.

And they'd always turn the signpost. You know, sort of like say, race this way. And to go that way was probably a crocodile infested swamp or something like that.

It's a cartoon. But in life, the devil, the enemy of God, he wants to deceive you and me. He wants us to go on the wrong path.

He wants us to believe the path of being good without God is okay. He wants to deceive us by making us believe, well, you're better than many people, so I'm sure you'll be okay with God.

[24 : 41] He wants to sell us the lie that God will simply accept us. That's his job. Those lies and deception and that path is the equivalent of us heading towards the swamp.

Only if we believe the lie of the devil, we're heading towards eternal judgment. We're heading towards hell. So in that context, isn't it good news to hear an honest, loving warning about the reality of sin and guilt when it would cause us to hear good news and to see where hope comes from?

You think about the government's advice on social distancing and being really hard on us not going anywhere unless it's essential. It doesn't come to us as a wonderful news, does it?

There's bad news in that three weeks of restrictions. But there is the prospect of good news, of lives being saved, of less pressure on our NHS.

So we hear it and we heed it. Bad news that can be good news. Bad news. In God's mercy, all through the Bible, the Bible exposes the danger of a path that walks away from God.

[26 : 02] And that's good news. Another way this bad news is actually good news is that it can give us freedom from a save yourself religion. And I guess there are lots of different varieties of save yourself religion where we are trying really hard to earn the approval of God.

And maybe you've had that experience. I have certainly lived that kind of religious life. And it is exhausting trying to prove yourself. It's exhausting to try and prove yourself to another person. Never mind trying to prove yourself to a perfect God. And we need to understand that save yourself religion will exhaust you and at the same time will get you nowhere.

Did you see the man on the news who ran a marathon on his balcony in France, 26 miles, looping around his little balcony, working really hard but getting precisely nowhere?

It's a great picture of save yourself, do it yourself religion. And don't waste your life on a false promise. You and I, we cannot get to God by our own efforts. We need outside help.

[27 : 13] We need God to come down. We cannot go up. And there's one last way that this bad news is actually good news or certainly prepares us for good news.

It stands as the dark background, the background of our sin, which lets the good news of Jesus shine. Maybe you've been to the jewellery shop where the person behind the counter brings out a diamond for you to look at.

And there's one last way that we can see. And there's one last way that we can see. And there's one last way that we can see. But the diamond always seems to be presented on a black cloth. The diamond sparkles brightest against that dark backdrop.

In the same way, against that dark backdrop, the good news, the glory of Jesus coming to be our saviour really shines. So I would simply say today, do not ignore this bad news message.

Take it seriously. Reflect on it. Because it could save your life. It could save your life. And for eternity.

[28 : 28] Now, let's think about the good news of the cross of Jesus. And it begins with a tiny word. The word but.

Tiny word. Life-changing significance. But now, a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify.

So we know how the word but works. So we hear, I'd love to help but. I'm busy. Or positively, competition is strong.

But you won. But is a word that reverses previous statements. So what's Paul said previously?

By trying to keep the law. By trying to be right with God by yourself. You remain under sin. You are guilty.

[29 : 29] And without a defence. You are conscious of sin. But lacking the power to change. But.

But. Jesus. And his death on the cross. Reverses that. Faith in Jesus. And his work on the cross. Will make you right. Will make you right with God. For now. And all eternity. You have saving faith. In Jesus. And what he came to do.

Verse 21. Gives us good news. Because it says to us. Simply. The Bible has always said. From beginning to end. Righteousness. Comes from God.

He says that the law and the prophets testify. Of our righteousness from God. What does he mean? The law and the prophets represent the Old Testament. They testify. Imagine them in a court of law. And they're saying. We have always said.

[30 : 27] Beginning to end of the Old Testament. There's only one way to be right in God's eyes.

To have right standing with God. It's not through keeping the law. It comes as a gift from God. It comes as a gift of grace.

God provides. The righteousness. God provides the right standing we need. So that we can be right with him. To show this. Let's go on a quick tour. In the Old Testament.

Let's go. First of all. To the Garden of Eden. And then we'll head to Egypt. And then we'll go to the temple. In Jerusalem. And we need to escape the confines.

Of our four walls. So let's go on a tour. First of all. To the Garden of Eden. What do we find there? Adam and Eve. As we said. Living. Enjoying. Perfect relationship. With one another. But especially with God.

God was walking. Talking with them. Made that place. So he could be with them. They are righteous. They have peace with God. Right standing with them. But what happens when sin comes? Then they disregard God's word.

[31 : 26] And God's rule. With sin comes shame. And with that shame comes hiding. Their answer to the sin and shame that they know and experience for the first time is to sew together fig leaves.

To make a covering. And that would be funny except that it's so tragic. But here is this hopeless effort to hide sin. It's always foolish to think that we can cover up our real shame and our real guilt

before an all-seeing, all-knowing God.

So that was their response to fig leaves. And they were useless and worthless. But God's response. In grace. God clothed them. God clothed them. And God clothed them by sacrifice.

Animals were killed so that they could wear animal clothes. To make the point that our covering our righteousness beyond sin and shame and disgrace is a gift from God.

We cannot cover over sin. God can and God does. That was a garden. Let's now move to Egypt and the Passover. So we just finished in the book of Genesis.

[32 : 41] That's the next book, Exodus. The final plague that we find in the book of Exodus is to do with the firstborn. So remember Pharaoh had said to Moses, no, I won't let the people go to worship God, to become free people who can enjoy God.

And so God sent plagues to show his power. But Pharaoh's heart gets harder and harder. Pharaoh, who at the beginning had tried to kill all the firstborn children of Israel. Well, the judgment of God is that the firstborn in Egypt will die.

But Israel would be spared that judgment. And how would they be spared the judgment? They'd be spared it in the sacrifice of a perfect lamb. And that the blood from that lamb being sprinkled on the doorpost.

That was the way for God's judgment to pass over. Sacrifice, death, blood of another. And then we go to the temple in Jerusalem.

I don't know if you've ever thought about the life of a priest in the Old Testament, but it strikes me as a particularly bloody business as they worshipped God. Because whenever an Israelite was conscious of sin and guilt, they would take an animal to the temple.

[34 : 04] That animal would be killed. There was a transfer of sin. The worshipper would put his hand on the head of the animal.

To say that sin was being transferred. That guilt was taken by the animal that was then killed. And a right relationship between a worshipper and God was restored.

The cost. Sacrifice. Blood. Three locations. One giant signpost. Pointing to the work of Jesus Christ. And the good news of Christianity. And here it is. How can you and I be right with God? How can you and I be worthy of God's welcome when we know our hearts, we know our hearts?

Only. Because Jesus is the perfect righteousness of God. He lived in your place a life of perfect obedience.

[35 : 00] All the way through his life leading to his death on the cross. And Jesus grants, Jesus gifts that right standing to us.

If we have faith that when Jesus died on the cross, he died for my sin as my saviour. So, so far, what have we seen?

We say that you and I, by nature, we are sinners who deserve judgement. We have seen that God, by his grace, he doesn't need to do it, but he chooses to do it out of love.

He provides Jesus. Jesus is perfectly righteous. He has right standing. He becomes that promised and perfect sacrifice who can cover sin and shame.

Who can secure our right standing with God. So one question remains. Jesus offers peace with God. How do I get that peace?

[36 : 02] How do I get that right standing? If Jesus remains outside of us, he has no help to us. We need Jesus in us and with us. Here's the good news. Verse 22.

This righteousness from God comes. How does it come? Comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. Faith in Jesus gives you right standing.

What is faith? Faith, as we find it in the Bible, in Christianity, says, I am trusting entirely on Jesus to save me.

To forgive me. To forgive me. To bring me to God. I believe that he is trustworthy. I believe that he died for me.

I believe that he is my only hope in life and in death. He is my only hope for salvation in the present and for all eternity. That's faith.

[37 : 08] It's resting in Jesus. It's trusting in Jesus. And it's offered today to you. Whoever you are.

And wherever you are. By faith. By faith. Jesus is offered to you. And if you receive him. And receive his forgiveness.

Then you will have right standing with God. That's our good news. Here's the thing we need to recognise though. Faith by itself is not enough.

Faith needs the right object. Notice in verse 22. It doesn't say this righteousness from God comes through faith to all who believe.

It comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. So I'm going to guess if you're like me. At some point in your childhood.

[38 : 11] You find yourself at the bottom of the garden. Digging to Australia. I distinctly remember doing that with my brother.

Trying to get from the bottom of what used to be a potato patch. All the way to Australia. So imagine the child at the bottom of the garden. Digging their way to Australia.

And compare that with a person who has a ticket about to board a plane to Sydney. Now without being too negative to the hole digger.

Only one of those two people are going to get to their intended destination. Because faith in the spade is faith in the wrong object.

We need to have faith in the right object. The right person. The Bible says Jesus is the only one to trust.

[39 : 13] To be right with God. We don't trust ourselves. We don't trust anybody else other than Jesus. The Bible is clear. We bring nothing to the table except our sin. It's not a combination.

Jesus does his work and I contribute some and then God accepts us. No. Jesus does everything. We contribute nothing. In Christ as a free gift. We receive everything. That relationship that you and I were made for.

That peace in our hearts and our lives that we long for. There is only one person to go to for that. We are to look to Jesus.

We are to see the cross as the greatest news that we will ever hear. The great news that we need to hear right now. Let's just close by thinking why the cross is good news.

As we face COVID-19. What is this virus doing? It is reminding us in so many ways that life is fragile.

[40 : 22] We are seeing and hearing horrendous stories of hospitals, maybe especially in Italy, struggling to cope. And just having to sort this person is maybe going to make it and deserves to live this way.

We are just going to have to live to die. It is horrendous. And we are being reminded that life is short and life is fragile. And against that we need to look at the good news of Jesus' death.

Because in his dying, you can have eternal life. The life you always wanted actually.

At the end of the Bible, Revelation 21. We are promised that when Jesus comes back, as he will, he will make the world new. And for those who have faith in Jesus, we will live in a world free of sadness, sickness, tears, death, virus, warfare.

All of those things gone. Jesus and his church together in a perfect world with perfect joy forever. When life is fragile, we need the solid hope of eternity. This virus too is showing us our limitations and our lack of control.

[41 : 34] We make plans for the future, whether that's for our business or whether that's our holidays. And we're seeing those things falling apart. And again, in the good news of the cross, we discover that Jesus has answered our greatest limitation.

In that we are unable by ourselves to get to God. And it shows us that in him, by trusting in him, we are right with God. We know too, and we'll see, I'm sure, in the coming months that this virus is threatening futures.

Jesus has taken the greatest threat in anyone's future. The judgment of God is just anger against sin.

Jesus has taken that on himself. God is holy and God is just so. Somebody must pay for sin, her sin. The wonderful love of God says, I don't have to pay.

But by looking to Jesus, by trusting in him, I can believe that when he died on the cross, he died to pay for my sin. Jesus is the sin bearer of the world, paying for my sin if I'm trusting in him.

[42 : 53] So that in Jesus, today, you and I can have hope and an eternal future. We can have a secure identity in the Lord Jesus so that, come what may, he can be our rock and our refuge, our safe place.

This virus and all the news that we watch, it can make us profoundly fearful, can't it? The good news of Jesus, the good news of Christianity is that by faith, united to Jesus, God is our source of refuge and strength and security.

Remember our words from Psalm 62. My soul finds rest in God alone.
Why? Because my salvation comes from him. The cross is good news. I pray it will be good news for us all today.

Now we're going to close. Again, Kellen is going to lead us as we sing our closing hymn, which is a cornerstone reminding us that as a church, as the people of God, our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

[44 : 25] I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly trust in Jesus' name.

Christ alone, cornerstone, weak made strong in the Savior's love.

Through the storm, he is Lord, Lord of all. When darkness seems to hide his face, I rest on his unchanging grace.

In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.

Christ alone, cornerstone, weak made strong in the Savior's love.

[46 : 06] Through the storm, he is Lord, Lord of all.

When he shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in him be found.

Rest in his righteousness alone. Rest in his righteousness alone. Faultless stand before the throne.

Christ alone, cornerstone, weak made strong in the Savior's love.

Through the storm, he is Lord, Lord of all.

[47 : 12] Let me close with the benediction, the priestly blessing that Moses gave to Aaron
Numbers chapter 6.

The Lord bless you. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you for joining.

Thank you for joining. Digital Tea and Coffee will be happening shortly. If you want to join a community group while we are remote and you haven't received the information, please do get in touch through our website, through our administrator, and so that we can stay connected and we can look to help each other.

Thank you. Thank you.