

The Greatest News Ever

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[0 : 00] And Kim is going to read that. Thanks Kim. Thanks very much, Kim.

Well, please keep your Bibles open in that passage there. You'll need your Bibles this morning because we're going to be doing a little bit of flicking backwards and forwards in the first few chapters of Romans.

You need to be wide awake this morning. It's going to take a little bit of hard work, so keep with me on this. But this is exciting news. The title we have given it is the greatest news ever.

What the Gospel provides. As I say, it comes at a conclusion of a lot of bad news.

And eventually we come to some great news. Well, let's talk to God as we pray and ask for His help in this together. Our Father, we thank You for Your Word.

[1 : 58] Help us to be people who take seriously what Your Word says. Father, please burn within our hearts the wonder of Your salvation.

What is familiar and what is known to us. May it become fresh and like news that we have heard for the first time.

May it penetrate deep into our own lives. Giving us a greater joy. A greater love for You.

And a greater desire to share this love with a world that is in desperate need. So please help us all this morning.

Pour out Your Spirit generously upon us all. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, if I say to you the name Thierry Henry, what comes to mind?

[3 : 26] Handball? Cheat! Unfair! Unjust! The infamous handball that sent Ireland out of the World Cup qualifiers.

It was one of the greatest injustices in the world of sport. And we all love our sport so much that if a referee gets it wrong, we demand that justice is done.

On a more serious note, I read this week about Naomi Campbell. I'm sure you've heard about her. She's a supermodel that's earned millions and millions of dollars.

Well, a number of years ago, she received two uncut diamonds from the president of Liberia. She kept it a secret for all of these years.

And what's so terrible about that is, these diamonds have been mined by children as young as six and seven. Often captured and taken away.

[4 : 33] Many of them often die. The sale of those diamonds, what have become blood diamonds, have been used to fund the Civil War. Which has seen countless thousands murdered and the rape of many women and children.

Of course, she says, I didn't know anything about that sort of thing. Now, how do you feel when you hear news like that? I think we all feel a sense of anger and outrage.

Because the world wants justice. We want the guilty punished. And we want the innocent set free. We all long for fairness.

We want all wrongs put to right. In fact, we demand that justice be done. Now, as we read through the book of Romans, we discover that God not only loves justice, He demands that justice is done.

So, look at chapter 2. And in verse 2. Here, it's speaking about God's anger at all the wickedness and all the evil that there is in the world.

[5 : 46] And we read in chapter 2, verse 2. Now, we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. Verse 6.

Verse 6. For God will give to each person according to what he has done. Verse 11. For God does not show favoritism.

You see, God is not like some corrupt judge. He doesn't turn a blind eye or accept bribes. All He does is fair. Everything He does is just because it's based on truth.

And when we get to Romans, chapter 3, verse 21, the section that was just read to us, this whole theme of justice is picked up again. It's telling us how God works out and satisfies His justice in this world.

Just as an aside, the little phrase that we have in verse 21, this righteousness, and again in verse 22, can be translated as the justice of God.

[6 : 53] So in verse 26, we read that He is keen to demonstrate His justice. Now that's all good news for us because we want a judge who is fair, a judge who is going to put all wrongs to right, and who's going to correct all the injustices that we have in our own lives and in the world around us.

So this is exciting news. We're introduced to a God who demands that justice is done. But there's a problem.

You see, the big argument of Romans 1-3, as we've been looking at over the last few weeks, is that we are all under God's judgment. Back in chapter 2, verse 5, it describes the world like this.

Because of our stubbornness and our unrepentant hearts, we are storing up wrath against ourselves for the day of God's wrath, when His righteous judgment will be revealed.

And in case we think we are somehow different from those kind of people, because we're in church this morning and we're reading our Bibles and we're very good people, His conclusion is terrifying.

[8 : 18] Chapter 3, the end of verse 22. He says, There is no difference. For all have sinned.

Whether you go to church or read your Bibles or not, we all fall short of the glory of God. And this is the big message, that we are all guilty.

We may never have murdered or had a terrorist activity or plotted a bomb or anything like that, but we've all gossiped and disobeyed. And as far as God is concerned, He treats us all the same.

We're all deserving of His judgment. But that's not the only message of Romans 1-3. There was a good news aspect to it as well. Back in chapter 1, verse 16 and 17, we were introduced to the gospel, which is described in verse 16 as the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

Verse 17, For in this gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed. It's telling us that there is a way that guilty people like you and me can be right with God, we can escape His judgment, we can receive forgiveness, and we can have the wonderful blessing of being His children.

[9 : 40] So even though we are guilty, the good news is we can be forgiven. Now that creates tension for us, doesn't it?

On the one hand, can we see this? That God demands justice, which is bad news for us because we're all guilty. But on the other hand, we have God's offer of forgiveness, which is good news for us because we all need it.

But let's think about this. If God is fair in His judgment, how can He forgive people if we're guilty?

If God is supposed to be just and righteous in all He does, how can He remove the punishment that we justly deserve? If God were to forgive us, it would be like turning a blind eye to our wickedness and sin.

God would be seen as nothing more than a corrupt judge who is open to bribes and who cares very little for justice. So how can God be both just and forgiving at the same time?

[10 : 50] How can God be gracious and compassionate while being righteous and fair? Well, this is the tension that is being built up through the first few chapters.

It's a little bit like a tug of war. If we could imagine God on the one side being the anchorman for justice, but then on the other side, God is also the anchorman for the side of forgiveness.

And we have this tension. One is pulling against the other. Justice on this side, forgiveness on the other side. And it's like we're stuck in the middle, being ripped apart.

Our life is in the balance. Of course, if justice wins, then what about God's desire to forgive? And if forgiveness wins, what about God's promise to be just?

How can God express simultaneously his justice and his forgiveness? Well, in an age when we all want justice, but we don't want to be judged, the gospel provides the solution.

[12 : 07] First, we have God's faithful intervention. In chapter 3, verse 21, it comes out with this great, big, enormous statement, but now, something has happened.

He's introducing us to the good news of the gospel. The tension is finally broken so that we can be forgiven, while at the same time, God's justice can be satisfied.

And it's all possible because, look at verse 21, a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known. As we've been saying, the uncomfortable truth all along is that we can never be good enough for God.

Look at chapter 3, verse 10. It says there that there is no one righteous. Not even one.

The end of verse 12, there is no one who does good. Not even one. Our own performance, our own goodness, our own life, whether we go to church and read our Bibles and pray, whatever we do, it's never going to make us acceptable.

[13 : 26] To come to God the way we are is just going to leave us condemned. There is no one righteous, but now, verse 21, a righteousness from God has come.

There is a performance record that will make us acceptable to God. God has made it known to us. And this is God's faithful intervention into a helpless world.

His righteousness is a perfect record. It is nothing less than God's own record. It is His life because it comes from God and it is now offered to you and to me.

He said, you can now have this performance. So it means that our whole struggle to be accepted, our desire to be right with God is now over.

The fear of facing God's judgment is gone because God has made His righteousness, His record, His perfect performance available to us. He's offering it to us.

[14 : 32] So that we can stand before God, accepted and welcomed, seen as perfect and blameless in His sight.

He has done something about it. The second, this intervention from God results in a wonderful declaration.

Verse 24. It tells us there that we have been justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

This word justified relates to the righteousness from God in verse 21. But justified has a double action. On the one hand, it deals with our deserved punishment, but on the other hand, it provides our desired forgiveness.

On the one hand, it means that we are no longer treated as guilty rebels. Romans 1 to 3 is telling us that we are guilty, that we are people outside of God.

[15 : 42] But now, because of Christ, our deserved punishment has been dealt with. And we'll get to that in just a minute. So we're no longer treated as a guilty person.

But that's only one side of the good news. The other side of the good news is that we are now treasured as a forgiven child. We can receive forgiveness, and we are now welcomed and accepted into God's family.

And we are now treasured like a son or a daughter. He looks upon us and he treats us like he does his very own son. And if we pull this into our lives, if we experience this through our faith in Christ, our whole life is transformed.

God's love is transformed. But it brings us back to the same question that we're having the whole way through this. How can God do that?

What about his justice? How could God treat somebody who is guilty as innocent? That's completely unfair and unjust.

[16 : 56] How could God do that? How would you feel like it if somebody had robbed your house and smashed up the place while you were out?

And you come back and you see the mess all over the place. But the guards arrive to tell you that the robber has been caught. They've been sentenced and, well, you read in the newspaper the next week that the judge just felt very kind that week and he's just let them off and said, that's okay, you can go.

Don't worry about it. Wouldn't you feel a little angry and a little annoyed? Well, that's exactly what God is doing to us. How can he treat somebody who is guilty like us as innocent?

That's unfair. How can he do it? Well, this gets to the very heart of the gospel in verse 24. Let's read verse 24 again.

We are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him, that's Jesus, as a sacrifice of atonement.

[18 : 14] The death of Jesus Christ on the cross is how God deals with our deserved judgment and our desired forgiveness. And when we understand the cross, we see how the tension between God's justice and God's forgiveness is settled so that at the same time God remains fair and just.

And the key phrase in this passage is in verse 25 where it says, God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement.

Whenever we come across the word atonement in the Bible, it's always in relation to God's wrath or anger.

Atonement simply means turning aside or turning away God's anger. You may have a little note at the bottom of your Bible to tell you that. Now, to help us understand this a little bit more, I'd like us to turn back to Numbers in the Old Testament, chapter 16.

Now, I haven't got a page number so whoever's there first can call it out. Numbers chapter 16. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers.

[19 : 31] Pardon? Pardon? I didn't get that. I'm sorry. 1-5-3. Okay.

1-5-3, Numbers, chapter 16. And we're going to look at verse 46. Now, as you're turning to that, let me just give you a little context for this in Numbers.

The people, God's people, have continually rebelled against God. They have grumbled against Him. They've disobeyed Him.

They've continually pushed the boundaries. And because of their sin, God is angry. He's rightly angry at their behaviour. And He sends a plague amongst the people.

A plague that has serious consequences because people are dying. So the big question that's being asked at this stage is, what are we going to do about God's anger?

[20 : 33] How can we turn it aside? How can we stop it? Well, look at verse 46. Moses, who was the leader of the people, said to Aaron, his assistant, take your censer and put incense in it along with fire from the altar and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for the people.

Wrath, or anger, has come out from the Lord. The plague has started. started. So Aaron did as Moses said and he ran into the midst of the assembly.

The plague had already started among the people but Aaron offered the incense and he made atonement for them. He stood between the living and the dead and the plague stopped.

Through that sacrifice, through that work, atonement was made. The wrath of God stopped.

Now in Romans chapter 1 verse 18 we read that God's anger is presently being revealed, is presently being poured out against the wickedness and the godlessness of men in this world.

[22 : 02] And we've got to ask exactly the same question. How are we going to deal with his anger? Answer, we need atonement.

We need someone who is going to turn aside God's anger. And how does he do that? Well, in chapter 3 verse 25 it says, God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement.

Jesus becomes the anger absorber for us. The wrath of God was deflected from us onto Christ. Jesus bore the punishment that we justly deserve.

Now we struggle with all this kind of talk because we don't like to think of God who gets angry with us. We like to think of a God who's a bit of a grandfather figure who sits in a nice comfortable chair and hands out sweets and lets us do what we like.

We're troubled with a God who is angry. You see, when we get angry, it's uncontrolled and it's temper-like. we start throwing things and we get into a fit of rage.

[23 : 18] But with God, his anger is always controlled and it's reasoned. It's never temper. It is his personal hostility to evil and his acts of involvement to punish sin.

But you say, okay, I can kind of get that. But couldn't we say that God hates sin but he loves the sinner? How about that?

Well, I've said that before but I think it's a little bit unhelpful because the Bible makes it very clear that God does hate sin and we the sinners, the people who do all these wrong things, we must be punished.

And the most uncomfortable truth is we too are under God's wrath. Because our sin is always first and foremost an offence to God.

So you can never separate the sin from the sinner. The two of them are together. So if God is angry at sin, God is also angry at me.

[24 : 29] And he's angry at you. Now because God is just and he can't ignore sin and pretend it was not there.

He must deal with it. But it's also true that he must be forgiving, he must be kind, he must be compassionate.

So when we come to the cross, what we see is God's wrath or his anger being dealt with and at the same time we see his compassion as our sins are forgiven.

remember we talked about the tug of war. On the one side we have God, the anchorman for justice and pulling in this direction. And then on the other side we have God, the anchorman for forgiveness pulling the other.

And both are attributes of God that can never give way. And we have this tension and our life is held in the very balance. And what happens is God in Christ, he steps into the middle.

[25 : 43] And as he dies on the cross with his arms outstretched, he spans the tension that exists. And on the one hand, as he's nailed to the cross, he's holding justice in one hand.

And as his hand has been nailed, he's holding forgiveness in the other. And it's like he pulls them together in his death.

So that simultaneously our deserved wrath is dealt with and our desired forgiveness is provided.

All of this happens on the cross where God satisfies his justice. God is not going to do it.

Now before we move on, we must make something else very clear. Sometimes people talk about that God is angry. The God of the Old Testament is just a big angry head. He goes around slaughtering people and killing people.

[26 : 44] Whereas when we come to the New Testament, it's all full of flowers and Jesus loves everybody. God is just a big angry head. He is just a big angry head. He holds the two together. He holds the two together. God is both full of wrath and full of love.

He is just and forgiving. He holds the two together. God is just a big angry head. And then, have a flick back to Exodus chapter 34. This is a very well-known passage.

Exodus 34. Verse 6.

And here we see the full character of God. Let's read from verse 6.

It says, The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger. Remember, this is the God of the Old Testament.

[27 : 56] Slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet, he does not leave the guilty unpunished, abounding in love.

But he doesn't leave the guilty unpunished. How can he do that? Well, this is what Christ has done. As Jesus dies on the cross, it is God in Christ.

It is God who dies. It is God who comes down in the person of Jesus Christ. It is God himself who hangs on the cross. And it is God who absorbs the anger himself instead of us.

So that he remains just and forgiving. Compassionate and gracious. But yet he never leaves the guilty unpunished.

For Christ was punished for us. Isn't that amazing? It all means that God's justice has been satisfied.

[29 : 13] Verse 25. The middle of verse 25 of Romans chapter 3. 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. He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time. So as to be just. Now when we say God is satisfied, it's not like he's rubbing his hands together with excitement and thinks, Oh, I've had an opportunity to dish out my anger.

No, he's satisfied in that he has been forgiving, but never at any cost to his justice. Even though the guilty are now treated as treasured children of God, it has never been to the expense of his justice.

In fact, the whole death of Jesus proves how fair and how kind he is. See what it says in the second part of verse 25.

He did it to demonstrate his justice because in his forbearance, he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. Throughout the history of the world, as we read through the Old Testament, people died.

[30 : 35] People died because of their sin. It was part of God's judgment. But it was never the ultimate judgment. There was an ultimate judgment to come. But now because of the cross, when Jesus dies, he takes all the sins, the sins of the past, the sins of the present, and the sins of the future, and he takes them all on himself.

And all of that punishment, all of that judgment, falls on Christ. The cross is the ultimate place of justice.

This is where all sin, once and for all, is dealt with. This is where your sin was dealt with.

This is where your future sin is dealt with. It's where my sin is dealt with. That's why Jesus cried on the cross.

It is finished. It's over. It's complete. God is satisfied with what he has done. The work is done.

[31 : 47] We are set free. We're liberated. We can go as his children rejoicing, filled with joy because we are his children. The end of verse 26 summarizes it all.

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

In this once and for all event, God takes action both to punish and to forgive.

Simultaneously, we see his love and anger. We sang earlier, where wrath and mercy meets. In a minute, we're going to sing another song as we think about the wrath of God that is poured out on Christ, absorbed and taken by him, that we, the guilty, might be declared righteous, blameless, in his sight.

It's the greatest news ever, and it deals with the greatest problem, our sin. Let's pray together.

[33 : 09] Amen.