

The problem solved

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Preacher: Philip Wells

[0 : 00] And here we're going to look at the cross of Jesus Christ. And this talk is aimed to show that Christian faith is exactly the best news that each and every one of us needs.

That's my aim this morning. So I've entitled it The Problem Solved. And it is the biggest ever problem solved.

And here are people rejoicing because the problem is solved. And I would really like it if we got to the end that at least one or two of us could say, yeah, I get that.

It's quite good. Or perhaps even a little bit more enthusiastically than that. Because it really is the biggest ever problem solved. And I'd like to go through it by saying, what is the problem?

When was it solved? How is it solved? And who does it affect? So those are the questions that we will go through this morning. God helps us. And we've asked for help because we need it.

[1 : 03] And we also say, why has God done it this way? So let's begin. If you have your Bible there, it would be really very helpful to look at the Bible. What problem is being solved?

Well, actually, there are two problems. The first problem is the problem for each and every human being, which is the problem of God's future wrath.

You might think that your biggest problem is paying your mortgage or finding employment or paying for housing or whatever it is, getting your studies done.

But God says, actually, there's a problem that you're not even properly aware of. And that problem is what will happen on the last day when I ask you to give account of your life and you stand before me, says God.

What will you do on that future day? God's future wrath. And Paul has been working through this and he puts it in terms of the Jew and the Gentile.

[2 : 15] So let's think of what he says about the Jew. Here's the Jew. The Jew has the law. This is how he's speaking to them. They have the privilege of the law.

And here's the Gentile who doesn't have the law. They all live in God's beautiful world. There's the sun shining. And here's the world of trees and elephants.

And the Jew, as Paul speaks to the Jewish person, says, well, your problem is this. You have God's law.

Therefore, you of all the nations of the world know about the food regulations, kosher food. You of all the nations of the world know about circumcision.

You of all the nations of the world know about how God dealt with your forefather Abraham and all of that. You've got that outward stuff. But the problem is that does not help you deal with your heart.

[3 : 15] It's true of the Jewish religion of those days. True of many religions these days. There are outward things. But does it deal with the inner problem, what he calls the hidden person?

He referred to that in chapter 2 where he says about the circumcision of the heart, the inward things.

And he says, here's my point. What about your heart? That's where sin lies. And it has not been dealt with by outward things.

You are somebody who know what ought to be done. But you cannot do it. The Jews of Paul's day were not the last people to have this problem.

It would be true of nominal Christianity too, wouldn't it? People know what the Bible says. But find that they cannot obey it as it ought to be obeyed. The Gentiles, as Paul saw them, the non-Jews, were in a different position.

[4 : 26] They were people in gross, ignorant error. They had no idea really. Spiritually, they don't know their right hand from their left. Got no idea what sort of God God is.

They've got no idea how his world is meant to operate. Well, they have something of it. But they managed to suppress that. And they managed to convince themselves it's perfectly fine to do things completely differently.

They are in gross, ignorant error. And typically, this shows in the worship of things that are not God. So instead of worshipping the God who made everything, they typically worship the things that God has made. So Paul earlier on says they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped created things rather than the creator.

So it's somebody worshipping trees or worshipping elephants or whatever. And of course, that doesn't have to be in the sense that in a Hindu culture, that would be very obvious.

[5 : 28] But in our Western culture, we take the glory of God and then we pin that on perhaps intellect or we pin it perhaps on wealth and finance or perhaps we pin it on politics or we pin it on ourselves.

And we actually end up worshipping idols, although we don't necessarily realise that that's the case. And Paul says both these approaches are so insulting to God that they merit his future wrath.

And he says both these, the Jew and the Gentile, both alike, as he says, are under sin. And if you look at the quotes, chapter 3, verse 9, what should we conclude?

Are we any better, we Jews? Not at all. We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are under sin. And in chapter 2, verse 16, he has said, this will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.

It's the secrets of the heart that God will look at on those days. Not only the secrets, but he will look at that. And in chapter 2, verse 3, he has said, he has talked about God's judgment.

[6 : 54] And in chapter 2, verse 5, he has said, because of your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

And in chapter 3, verse 5, he has said about God bringing his wrath on us. And chapter 3, verse 23, in the bit that Chris read, he says, there is no difference.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. He says, Jews, Gentiles. If you were to put it into today's terms, people who have a very highly developed, sort of puritanical view of morality, they fail.

And people who have a very free and easy, individualistic, liberal view of morality, they're under God's wrath too. All alike, have fallen short of the glory of God.

And part of the problem is we don't even realize it. Part of the problem is that our consciences, our spiritual sensitivities all dulled, and we think, what's the problem?

[8 : 13] And God tells us, what's the problem? He says, you're wrong. You're under my wrath. And that's problem number one. Problem number two is a problem for God.

Because God sent his son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him should be saved. And God is on the trail of taking people who are sinners and gathering them into his family.

That's what he wants to do. And this is a problem for him. How can he possibly do that? And it's put in this verse, in verse 26, chapter 3, verse 26, how can he be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus?

So we need to explain a few things about this. God, in his character, is a righteous, fair, honourable, straight, true judge.

That's who he is. And, let me get myself right here. Corruption is when a judge goes to court, sees a guilty person, maybe receives a bribe, and says, oh, that person can go free.

[9 : 52] He's okay. That's corruption, isn't it? If we had a legal system that was full of that, we'd be in despair. Now, is God a corrupt judge?

Because how can he, well, let's just think of this word to justify. Now, you have it there in verse 26. Justice at the present time, so as to be just, and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

I need to ask you to work hard on this with me, on the words that are being used. A normal way a word used, here's an example of it. Beauty is the noun.

Beautiful is the adjective. And beautify is the verb. So, beauty is the noun. If you are beautiful, that would be the adjective.

To the verb, we're to make somebody beautiful. So, none of you here need making beautiful. But if you could imagine somebody who needed it, you know, make up and blah, blah, blah. We have in here a Greek word, which is translated righteous.

[11:02] You noticed that word, did you? Or certainly the word righteousness. Righteousness. And we want a verb as well. So, the noun righteous means just and true and upright.

Righteousness is the noun. Righteous is the adjective. And we don't have a verb that you can use. So, if you made one up, you'd say righteousnessify.

But we don't have a word like that. In Greek, you can do that. And Paul does that in here. But we have to use another word and bring that into service. And we say justify.

So, I suppose you could do it. Noun, righteousness. Adjective, just. Verb, justify. You could do it that way.

But just trying to get us in tune with the text here. And this is to do with the activity of a judge. So, I'm going to turn to Deuteronomy 25 and tell you what a judge does because it's there in one nice sentence.

[12:16] And it says this. When men have a dispute, they are to take it to court and the judges will decide the case. And what does the judge do?

Deuteronomy 25 verse 1. Acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty. If the guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge will make him lie down and have him flogged, etc., etc.

That's the justice system of those days. But the point of it is this. What does the judge do? He has the person in front of him and he makes a decision.

Is this person guilty? In which case he's acquitted, declared innocent. Sorry, did I say that?

I said that the wrong way around, didn't I? Is this person guilty? In which case he's condemned. Is this person not guilty? In which case he is declared innocent and treated as innocent.

[13:18] That's what the judge does. And the word to justify is the word which I then said to declare innocent.

That's what the word justify means. To count as righteous and treat as such. So here's the person. Comes before the judge. The judge has got two possible boxes to put this person in.

One of condemnation and wrath. One of righteousness and glory. And the judge will condemn the guilty perhaps or righteousnessify or justify the innocent.

So he'll put them into one box or the other box. That's what a judge does. And the question is, as God is judge, how can he justify us?

Us. How can he put us into this box marked innocent? Not guilty. Treat them as not guilty.

[14:26] How can God take us and put us into this box? Because we're under his wrath. We're sinners. How can God possibly look at sinners and say, innocent.

Go free. That's the point. Because that's what God's in the business of doing, isn't it? That's what it's all about. So in chapter 4, verse 5, Paul says, God justifies.

Look what it says. Chapter 4, verse 5. What does it say? God justifies who? You tell me. Chapter 4, verse 5. God justifies? The wicked. The scandalous.

How can God, who is the righteous judge, take wicked people and put them into this box marked righteous, headed for glory, congratulate them, pat them on the back?

Do you see what I mean? How can God do that? It's a huge problem for God. How can God justify sinners? And bear in mind that Paul is not just thinking of the nice, apparently nice, Jewish people, well educated in spiritual things, but he's thinking of the rough, scruffy, uslot Gentiles who by heritage and upbringing don't know who God is or that sort of thing.

[15:54] How can God take such people and justify them? Say, innocent, acquitted, go free, righteous.

And you can see the depth of the problem because God's not, it's not just something that God theoretically might do, but something he's already been up to. He's already been doing this. In verse 25, it says, in his forbearance, he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.

So if you think of David, who was a sinner, wasn't he? And God treated him as a favourite. How could God justify David?

We think of Abraham, who didn't stand up and say his wife was his wife, but let her be maltreated as if she was somebody else or potentially. How could God treat him as an innocent person?

God's been doing this all the way through. How could he do that? We need the help of the Holy Spirit to realise what a scandalous thought this is.

[17:11] That God could justify the wicked and has been doing so for hundreds of years already. justice demands a condemnation verdict on sinners, Jews and Gentiles alike.

So the question is, this is the problem, how can God justify sinners and not be corrupt? So you see this in verse 26, he did this to demonstrate his justice at the present time so as to be just. and the one who justifies sinners. So, apparently there's a solution to this problem. What is it? Well, there's the problem.

Get the point of that? Problem for us because we're guilty. Problem for God. How can he treat guilty people as if they're not guilty? Second question, when?

When did the problem get solved? because Paul says things have changed. Look at verse 21. But now. And then there's another place where it says almost exactly the same thing.

[18:31] Where is it? I think I was thinking of verse 26 at the present time.

But let's we can certainly stick with the now that's in verse 21. He says now something has changed. Let's put a little timeline. There's the Old Testament.

the Old Testament as you will know being various books and you could divide it you could say it's all the law or you could say it's the law and the prophets but just meaning the Old Testament what we from a Christian point of view would call the Old Testament.

And the Old Testament leads us through to the coming of Jesus Christ and he says that the Old Testament testifies to what is going to happen.

Look verse 21 now a righteousness from God apart from the law has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify.

[19:38] So he says something has happened now 2000 years ago being the now and the law and the prophets the Old Testament has been testifying to this and saying about it and saying it's coming this is what's what's God's going to do this is the sort of thing he's going to do but how he actually manages it we don't know yet but Paul says now it's been made clear the law and the prophets testified to it but now it's made clear and it's a way which the law was incapable of doing.

He says a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known the law couldn't generate this you couldn't get to this point by the law by knowing the right thing to do by living the right way you couldn't do it that way but without that a righteousness from God has been made known and he's talking about the cross which we'll come to in a moment and he says that in the cross Christ is presented so now all this history has been waiting but now Christ comes and he is let's get to what verse did I put there can't read my own writing 20 is it 25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood he did this to demonstrate his justice he verse 26 he's demonstrating his justice at the present time so something is being demonstrated presented in what Christ has done and he says this is the answer this is the righteousness that God has done so that people like us can be declared righteous can be justified how on earth has he done this the law and the prophets testified to it and now following on the timeline we've got this explosive fulfillment of God's purposes all because of what happened here at the cross and I'd like us to if we can to get a little grasp of the emphasis of that word now all through the centuries before people have been wondering how can I be right with God I know God does forgive but how can he do it I know we go to the temple and there's animal sacrifices and there's all sorts of paraphernalia that happens do this do that stand up sit down but can that really be enough so that my sins could be forgiven and that hangs over the whole of the

Old Testament but Paul says now look what God's done in Jesus Christ now the wonder of it and this is the new thing the Old Testament looks forward to the New Testament and the New Testament comes through Jesus Christ and it's called good news because it is good news so all through the Old Testament people wonder how is this going to work what's God going to do how is he going to solve all these problems and then suddenly God does it and people talk about it and say look this is great news God has solved these problems I think we ought to get a little bit of a wisp wisp wiff of the the grandeur of that what God has done now how has he done it well there are two key words that I'd like to draw our attention to one of them is the word redemption and he says they are justified this is verse now verse 24 just catch the thought from verse 23 there's no difference all have sinned

Jew and Gentile alike have sinned they've both fallen short of the glory of God and both are justified freely by his grace through here's the word the redemption redemption that came by Christ Jesus let's just think of that word redemption so wasn't Sam good being a redeemed slave excellent that's my illustration again there's the slave in the days of Paul Roman Empire worked on slavery so it wouldn't have been an unusual thing to use as an illustration people would have known this perhaps people would have been slaves or would have been redeemed from being slaves there's

the slave in chains there is either the payment of a price or the expenditure of great effort but redemption can cover both those thoughts and when the redeemed person is on the receiving end of this pow they're set free and this is telling us that there is a redemption in Jesus

[24 : 58] Christ that if you like there's a payment of a great price and you think who is it paid to and you can get into all sorts of tangles on that but it is a great price or if you like an expenditure of a great effort that a huge thing was achieved when Jesus died on the cross and whatever we may not know we cannot tell what pain he had to bear but we believe it was for us he hung and suffered there that we don't know the depth of what he did but what we do know is that it was powerful enough the price enough was paid so that ping we go free and we shall sing this later my chains fell off let's look at the second word which is in here in verse 25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood a sacrifice of atonement this gets a bit gory sorry about that but it's the reality of what it's like if you think back into the old testament what was

Israel taught she was sort of if you think of have you ever been done tennis coaching I know some of you will have done been taught tennis and things like that the way the person does it the way the trainer does it will take one person out and say will you please I'm going to show you how to serve so everybody watch this is how you serve you throw the ball up in the air not like that throw the ball up in the air and then you wang the back racket at it that's good so you take one person show them how to do it and Israel is like that one person taken away from all the other nations and God says this is how the principles of me really and in Israel the Old Testament people were taught that if you are a sinner if you commit sins that is a capital offence so it was put down in ten words wasn't it you shall have the

Lord your I can't even do them properly what's the first one you shall have no other gods before me you shall not make any graven image and worship it not take the name of the Lord in vain keep the Sabbath day holy then I'm going to get really confused anybody pardon honour mother and father! not steal do not commit adultery don't covet yeah that's the last one so we've got anyway pardon not bear false witness shall not kill yes okay I think we nearly got there I mean they're fairly straightforward aren't they apart from the fact I couldn't remember them but ten words ten things to do and the trouble is you find if you take them seriously you can't do them you can't do them and to fall short on those is a capital offence the wages of sin is death so there's an Israelite under sentence of death because of his or her sin and they were taught that whoops go back there is a provision and it involves taking an animal and there's a certain sort of procedure with this but typically they would involve putting hands on the animal's head as if

I think this is the thought that you've got a disease and you communicate it to the animal it's like a contagious thing but not like a disease in that when you've passed it on you don't have it anymore so it isn't just a sort of spreading like that it's a it's a transference so the sin goes on to the head of the animal that's the thought of it and this poor animal gets its throat cut it is a gory thing I'm sorry about that but it's it's through the Old Testament the blood of bulls and goats lambs and sheep every day in the temple these offerings were made and if it says one thing it must say this that sin is bad and it's so bad that it deserves a death but the other thing that it the puzzle that it raises is can the bull the blood of bulls and goats actually take away sins of course the answer is no but these these are models they're sort of models of a sacrifice of atonement and the the person on the receiving end of the sacrifice goes free conscience cleansed

[30 : 30] God says that that sacrifice takes away my sin how does that how can that be well I don't know but God says it's true the ancient Israelite would have thought and then Paul says well actually here's the reason because that was all pointing to this sacrifice which I put as a background there the cross of Jesus Christ it was not yet another animal sacrifice that God provided but the sacrifice of Jesus Christ verse 25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement in his blood he died on the cross bearing our sins in his own body on the tree so that we could go free that's how

God solved this through this redemption through this atoning work of Christ it's amazing isn't it that's what Jesus achieved on the cross that's the heart of Paul's argument now through the redemption that's in Christ Jesus presented as a sacrifice of atonement in his blood this is it that's the how it's all too brief to explain isn't it the magnitude of what Jesus achieved when he died for us who benefits well who does benefit is it people who work for it I think I've got the wrong reference here but verse 21 said was this righteousness this big thing that enables people to be righteous was it working for the law and he said in verse 21 no it's apart from the law it's without the law and in verse 27 he says what's the principle behind this is it of observing the law and then in verse 28 he says is

this justification is this being justified from observing the law and he says no it isn't it's not by working it's not by either working hard there's a Christian hymn let's see if I can remember this I bet I can't could my not the labors of my hands can fulfill thy laws demands could my zeal forever no respite no could my tears forever flow all for sin could not atone thou must save you must save and you alone could I do it by working hard by knowing the law by knowing Christian things and the answer is no and even the rituals of circumcision and things like that particularly Jewish works of the law don't do it it's not for those who are trying along that track it is says Paul it's for people who will believe when I say believe I don't mean in the sense of make believe you know psyching yourself up to believe something that you know isn't true it's believe in the sense of God promises something God says something is true and the act of faith is to say yes God you're right and it's not just that you're right in general that is right and that's me too that's the way faith is it receives what God offers by way of a promise and in case you're not sure whether that's really what it's saying let's see whether I've got these verses right verse 22 this righteousness from God comes through what does it say faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe and in verse 25 it says God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood and he says it in verse 26 he justifies those who have faith in Jesus and he says what's the principle of this verse 27 is it of observing the law no but that of faith verse 28 we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law is God the God of Jews only is he not the God of Gentiles since there is only one God who will justify the circumcised by faith this is verse 30 and the uncircumcised through the same faith it he says it is not about working harder getting yourself better either in any Jewish sense or a Gentile sense or any sense but it is taking what God offers look what I did with Jesus Christ look at his redeeming work look at his atoning work is that good enough for you it's offered to you will you put your trust in him so that you can be right with me says God and faith says yes yes what he did is enough for me [36 : 41] I I accept that I trust that I receive that and I want to say that the normal human response is that we want to try and work and get ourselves better and there's a very deep human reaction that says I'm not receiving something from God that he's done for me I haven't worked for I don't want that I want to feel that at least I've contributed something you know I'm okay on this and God says you have to humble yourself you have to humble yourself to say I cannot contribute anything to this it must be exactly what Christ has done and him alone and that's it yeah even for me and that is it not working trying in that sense but trusting and you see this has a very radical effect psychologically because what it says is that from the bottom of my understanding of myself in the presence of

God I am not saying look what I've done what I'm saying is I owe everything to God it's all this is the word grace it's all his kindness to me his generosity to me that's what grace is and you see in verse 27 he says where then is boasting it is excluded now I want to suggest that this has a very radical effect on the psychology of Christian people that their fundamental outlook on life is not looking after number one their fundamental outlook on life is thanks to God what he's done amazed at God's grace and here's somebody who is amazed at God's grace it would be a good title for a song wouldn't it amazing grace that would somebody ought to write that song amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me

I once was lost but now am found was blind but now I see that would be a great song wouldn't it I think somebody's already written it but there we are fifth question why why is does God do this because people deserve it is God running some sort of beauty competition where he looks around the world and he says that's quite a nice person I'll save them and that's quite a nice person too and that's a lot better than some of those other people is that how God does it and the answer is just totally no totally no please look at the word in verse 24 they are justified freely freely it means the original word means as a gift as a gift as a pure gift my illustration for this is a friend of my dad who was a headmaster in

Bridge North where I grew up and the headmaster said we were in Harleck walking along the beach anybody been to Harleck he says we were in Harleck walking along the beach I was walking on the beach with my!

a chap came up to me punched me in the face and knocked my front teeth out and the question is why did he do that and the answer is no reason at all he just did it it was completely gratuitous there was no reason for that to happen and the same word is used of Jesus where it says they hated him freely they hated him gratuitously they hated him without a cause and here it says God justifies

freely why does God justify me because no he just does it he just does it he justifies freely by his grace grace and grace is undeserved favour and I think the more deeply we can grasp how undeserved that is the more we will be in tune with the reality of things and the more we will honour [41 : 32] God as he deserves to be honoured because how does he justify us freely by his grace that's what it is amazing grace that's one reason and there's another reason in verse 25 he says what's all this about well in verse 25 it says he demonstrates his justice yet the cross says God how can you how can you be friends with that lot down there in Calvary I know what they're really like I know what they've been thinking how can you be friends with them where's the justice in that and God will say I'll tell you where the justice is they deserve to be condemned actually but I condemn Jesus instead there's the justice in it how did you overlook the sins of David and Abraham because Jesus

Christ died for them there's the justice of it and it is just such a brilliant solution isn't it verse 26 he did this to demonstrate his justice at the present time so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus what a remarkably grand plan this is you and I couldn't have come up with this that God will say I wanted to love those people I wanted to bring them into my family I have actually been planning this from before the world was made actually and here's the way I do it my own son Jesus Christ bears the penalty for their sins my wrath that ought to fall on those sinners falls on him so I can be totally just and welcome those people into my family I can justify the wicked because of what Jesus has done on their behalf and we could take it on a little bit and say if God had said the way I will save people is because they have to know what to do and the Jewish people say well that's us we know all about that and then the answer would be well what about the Gentiles they don't know what to do at all they are so ignorant that lot I want a way that the justification by faith makes the law in a sense irrelevant verse 29 is God the God of Jews only well he isn't he's the God of Gentiles too and here's the way of the one God who is the God of all humanity to bring into his family the circumcised the Jewish people and the uncircumcised people as well it's a sort of missionary vision isn't it God is going to bring all of them in all those races and what I want to say is it's such a grand thing but it's you and me too how do you think to come into God's kingdom how do you think to stand before God today how do you think that you will stand before God on the last day this is the way through the redemption that's in Christ Jesus through the sacrifice of atonement that's in Christ Jesus and I want to turn it into an invitation and to say maybe you hadn't quite grasped this before maybe you got some other idea of Christianity which you knew wasn't quite right maybe you thought it was just attending church a lot or being involved with people a lot and being part of the warmth of the group and the family and you know that doesn't get to the heart of it but this gets to the heart of it do you want to be in on this this!

is where it all comes from no longer under condemnation no longer enslaved have I managed to convince you of the uselessness the irrelevance of trying to be better of working at it of doing it yourself have I managed to convince you of that have I managed to convince you sufficiently of the immensity of the person of Jesus and the work that he achieved have I convinced you that sufficiently that you would say I will stake my everything on him for now for the future for eternity if he offers himself to me I will stake myself on that that's good enough for me that's faith I'm going to ask you are you putting your faith in Jesus as we sit here today and if not

[46 : 48] I say will you put your faith in Jesus as we sit here today will you close it with God and say that's what I want that's where I want to be that's what I want to be trusting in that's what I want to be at the foundation of my life if it isn't there Lord make it there ASAP and Christians you knew all this but it's great to spell it out again will you rejoice!

in the brilliance of this wonderful solution of the biggest problem ever even though you're not going to jump up and down are you in your heart thinking this is brilliant amen let's stop and sing we're going to sing number 7 7 6