

Jesus Christ - His death

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[0 : 00] And we're going to continue our look at the work of Jesus Christ. So the other time we did quite a big overview, but I'd like to break that down into smaller pieces and think of the work of Jesus Christ.

And in this work is Jesus solving the biggest problem ever by dying on the cross. That's what we're going to think about this morning as God helps us.

And I want to say that this message is a really good message. It's a message of good news. And God helping us as we've thought about this, I hope that we will think, yeah, this really is good.

This really is tremendous. So I'd like to look at it by asking five questions. So question number one, what?

What is the problem? Question number two, when? When was it solved? Question number three, how? How was it solved? Question number four, who?

[1 : 23] Who was it for? And question number five, why? Why was it done? So you've got all the interrogatives there. What, when, how, who, why?

So let's first ask the question, what is the problem that we're talking about? And the answer comes in two stages.

So part one, for human beings, the problem is the problem of God's future wrath. So you have the book of Romans open in front of you.

And if you flip back, you'll see in chapter one, verse 18, he says that the wrath of God is being revealed.

So there's a current, present aspect of God's wrath. But in chapter two, verse 16, he talks about the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ as my gospel declares.

[2 : 39] And in chapter two, verse five, it says, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

So Paul, who's telling us this, has in his mind that there is a huge problem of God's future wrath. And of course it is largely future. So it's something that is not yet fully evident. You may not be aware of this.

You may not think that it's a problem because it isn't here yet. But there is a problem about what will happen on the future day of God's wrath.

So I put a synonym for wrath, anger. Wrath, anger. One day God will look at every human being and see how they have done.

[3 : 41] And that will be a day when his anger is revealed. How does that work? Well, for Paul, it works in two ways.

Here is the typical non-Jew as Paul would have seen it in those days. So he's wearing a little robe to show he's not a Jew. And there he is in God's world with the trees and the sunshine and everything, all of creation around him.

And this person has worship and reverence, but it goes the wrong way. Instead of worshipping the creator, this person worships created things.

And as Paul sees it, he looks out on the world of people full of idols, making up their own version of what God is like and worshipping and trusting that.

And he says that they became fools and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

[4 : 59] So these are the people who, instead of worshipping the creator, take something that he has made, something that they have thought of, and they worship that instead or trust that.

And this, in fact, is a huge insult to God. This is a huge insult to God. And on the day of God's judgment, he will say how deeply offended he has been that people have made up who they want

to worship instead of worshipping him.

Now that's not the only sort of person that Paul is thinking of. He's thinking of his fellow Jew. Now his fellow Jew has the Bible.

Well, in those days it wouldn't have been the New Testament, but he would have had the Old Testament part of the Bible, and he would read that. And this person would be informed, unlike the ignorant Gentile, that this person knows very well what is the right thing to do.

This person, as Paul sees him or her, this is the one who hears the law. But it is not the ones who hear the law that count, it's the one who do the law.

[6 : 31] They know what's the right thing, but they don't actually do it. And this leads to some very interesting pieces of psychology.

You might imagine people who are very respectable, know the right thing to do. Perhaps they imagine that they do do all the right things, and they can end up being very proud and snooty and looking down on other people.

Alternatively, knowing the law, but not being able to do it, can lead to despair. So Paul has got these two basic types of person.

Both of them lined up for future wrath. One, because of the way they worship something they've made up. Another, because ethically, they know what they're supposed to do, but they don't do it. And as Paul has talked about this in quite an involved way in the letter that we're reading from, he summarizes it in chapter 3, verse 9.

[7 : 37] He says, Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. Both of these types of people are under sin. Both of them are headed for the day of judgment.

Both alike are under sin. Or as he says in the bit that was read, chapter 3, verse 23, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

And I would like to ask you whether you think this is a problem not only for people in the day when this letter was written, but a problem for people now.

I think perhaps nowadays people are a bit of a mixture of both of those things. There's loads of people who worship all sorts of gods and goddesses.

In Western culture it's not so obvious because we don't tend to make shrines like you do perhaps in a Hindu culture, but still people make things up in their mind and say, I couldn't worship the sort of God in the Bible.

[8 : 41] No. I prefer to think of God as this, this and this. People make mental images rather than metal images. And then there's people who know what they should do.

Perhaps you know what you should do. And perhaps if you look into your heart you say, I know what I should have done and should have thought, but I don't do it. I'm very conscious that I don't do it.

And so I'm asking you whether you would say this is your problem. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. That would actually include you and me.

Maybe I'm pointing out something that you didn't realize before. Maybe this is a need that you never realized you had.

My son in London had shared a student house and they found little, well they heard little scurrying noises in the wall and they might have thought, ah, how interesting.

[9 : 51] Little scurrying noises. How quaint. How sweet. How lovely. But then they found that things went missing from the kitchen and they found rat droppings.

And then they begin to think, actually those rather strange and unexplained noises are actually rats. we've got rats running through our house, running down the skirting board, running through the walls, running under the floor, running through the kitchen.

That's what they had. It was a problem that they didn't realize they had. They just saw some little indications but they didn't really understand them.

Now what the Bible is doing here is saying, maybe you can see the indications. Maybe you can say, well, you know, sometimes I feel guilty. When I look out in the world I see bad people doing bad things.

I see wars. What's all this about? Where does it come from? And the Bible says, this is showing a problem that you might not have known you had. It's the problem of sin, the need for forgiveness, and one day God will show his anger against not just the sin that you can see on the surface but the sin that was lurking underneath and all around.

[11 : 14] That's the problem part one. But there's actually another problem and you might even say this is a bigger problem. Not a problem for us but a problem for God.

The problem for God is how to be righteous and make righteous. You see it in verse 26 where it says, he says, oh, let's read a little bit of it.

Now a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known to which the law and 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, it says. And it talks about Christ and in verse 26 it says, 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 Christ.

There's a lot of words there so let's try and boil it down a little bit. In English, the word just and righteousness justify, righteous sound very different but in the original it's just one word translated slightly differently.

[12 : 46] So, this is all to do with justice and God is a just and righteous judge.

So this is to do with God in his capacity as a judge. And what does a judge do? A judge looks at people and he can say to them in his judgment one of two things.

He can say, I look at you and for various reasons perhaps to do with the evidence I've heard or perhaps to do with something else, I say you are a guilty person and when the judge says you are guilty it is called condemning and the person now enters a state of condemnation they have guilt and they will have to be punished to whatever degree in whatever way.

But the judge can say I've thought about it heard about it weighed it all up and for various reasons I say you are guilty.

You are guilty. You have done that. You shouldn't have done that. You've done it. You're guilty.

Now that's one thing that the judge can do. The second thing that a judge can do is to justify.

[14 : 20] If we were to use the word righteousness you try and make it into a verb as I'll show you in a moment. But what this would happen was that the judge would look at this person and say you are accused of this and you are accused of that and you are accused of something else I've come to my decision and I say you are not guilty.

You don't have to go to prison. You don't have to pay a penalty. You don't have to feel bad. I'm going to say you are not guilty and you leave this court without a stain on your character.

You leave this court with your head held high. You leave this court not worrying that the police are going to come and knock on your door and catch you for something because the police are there to protect you.

If you ring them up they'll help you. You are declared righteous and you're not headed for wrath but in Paul's way you say you're headed for glory.

So let's just think about those words. In English we have words like this beauty which is a noun.

[15 : 31] Beautiful which is an adjective and beautify which is a verb. So beautify by the look of you you've all been to the beauty treatment this week a beautician beautifies people and the beautician will do something to you to make you beautiful.

Honestly you don't need much doing to you as I look out at you. So that's the verb to make beautiful to beautify.

The righteousness set of words righteous that's being righteous righteousness is the noun righteous is the adjective but there isn't a verb so I'm just going to make one up to righteousify.

now when a judge righteousifies somebody it's not like a beautician that changes somebody what the judge does is to declare the judge gives a verdict and says I am going to count you as righteous that's the label I'm going to put on you or if you like that's the box I'm going to put you in here's a box marked condemned so some people get put into that box here's a box marked justified some people get put into that box and then they get treated according to which box they're in the guilty condemned face wrath and the ones counted righteous well they look forward to glory you actually have that word in chapter 3 verse 4 where it says let God be so that you may be proved right when you speak and the word proved right is the same word to justify or righteous if I doesn't do anything to God it just says what we says a verdict on him you are right you are good you are not guilty so this is the the situation about justifying it's the action of a judge it's the righteous action of a judge and it was promised in the Bible 321 a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify so that's the law and the prophets in the Old

Testament were saying

God will do this he will righteously declare people righteous and in fact he's already been doing it in verse 3 chapter 3 verse 25 it says in his in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished he's already been treating people as just but the question is you see this is the problem how can God do this to sinners this is the problem how can God take sinful people who have done wrong and look at them and say I've weighed everything up I've looked carefully into the case and I'm going to say to you not guilty go free without a stain on your character now you see I could understand God doing that for people who are not guilty but how can he do that for sinners do you see the big problem how could

[19:18] God possibly say to sinners not guilty leave this court without a stain on your character that seems to me so big a question so big a problem as really to bring into question God's own integrity how could he possibly be just and justify wicked people how to justify sinners how could God look at Gentiles who get things so wrong and ever justify one of them how could God look at people who were you know pagan Celts who've been running up and down painting themselves blue for centuries and say you're fine not guilty you know they've been making stonehenge and worshipping and sacrificing their children and God says that's fine off you go how could

God take people from a Hindu background who've been worshipping idols and ever ever say to them that's fine not guilty how could God ever take somebody from a western European background somebody reads the Guardian who completely dismisses the idea of any God that you're supposed to worship and they trust in stocks and shares and they trust in I don't know politicians as if they were worth trusting in and how could God ever take somebody like that and say that's fine go free not guilty big problem for God how can God the judge not be not end up being corrupt that's the word for it isn't it if you let off people that you know are guilty you know maybe they paid you something or maybe you know their uncle or you went to the same school as their grandfather or something like that that's corruption isn't it or being soft or being hypocritical here's the problem for God problem for us we face future off the problem for God how on earth can he justify sinners that was the question what was the problem question two when was the problem solved well this bit that we're basing our thoughts on does have some time references verse 21 but now a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known and he also says in verse 26 he did this to demonstrate his justice at the present time so as to be just and the one who justifies well what's the what's the time scale but now well he's saying now something's happened previously it hadn't happened but now it has and the then in the past was

Old Testament times the law and the prophets but now a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify the law and the prophets were telling us things for hundreds and hundreds of years but now something's happened and of course the now is the cross of Jesus Christ that's what he's exactly talking about isn't it now Jesus has died on the cross and now everything's changed now Jesus died on the cross and it says of this just look what it says verse 25 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 what he's saying is this is all finds its resolution and its revolution in Jesus dying on the cross God presented him it says as a sacrifice of atonement God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement in his blood and the contrast is with the Old Testament because it couldn't produce this verdict of not guilty it couldn't produce this gift of righteousness it couldn't do that and Paul says now a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known so all the things that the Old Testament all the law code the ethics of the Old Testament could not produce the verdict not guilty but this does this cross but now he says now it's been made known he says now

God has demonstrated his righteousness verse 25 26 the Old Testament testified that it was coming a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify but now it's come and you can see how revolutionary Paul thinks the cross is how great a work is the cross of Christ all those years we could not see why on earth God should forgive sins he did it but didn't see why seemed very unjust very strange but now it's all in the open but now we see the mighty thing that God has decided to do to make this possible and there it is there it is there it is there it is three crosses on a hill two of them are criminals the one in the middle is the son of

[25 : 59] God dying as if he were a criminal but now the righteousness of God is made known and Paul will tell us this that looks so weak is the mightiest of power this that looks so so unimpressive is the greatest wonder this that looks so foolish is the wisest thing of God and this that looks so disgraceful is actually the brightest expression of glory of God so that's when the problem was solved but how can we say anything about the mechanics of it what was happening when

Jesus died on the cross well there are two words I'd like to pick out from here and one of them is in verse 24 it says all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace they're declared not guilty freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus so let's think of this word redemption redemption is the noun redeem is the verb it's an idea that is mostly to do with slaves so there's a slave with a chain on his or her foot this person is enslaved and how can they be freed well they could be freed by an act of great power or the payment of a great price and of course in literally in the slave market in those days you could redeem a slave as a slave a bit like eBay

I suppose go through the city and the slave market and every one of these people has chains on them either metaphorically or literally and you say I'd like to set this person free well that would cost you how much will it cost you it cost you this amount well really and what you're doing is redeeming you're paying a cost to set somebody free and when they're redeemed they're set free no longer a slave no longer chained up no longer constrained and limited set free that's what happened to the people of God in the time of Exodus God redeemed them by a mighty hand they were slaves in Egypt and God set his people free and Paul says that's what happened when Jesus died on the cross. A great powerful act was done. A great price was paid. And the result of it is redemption through Christ Jesus. Set free. And you might say, well, what's the act of power?

What's the price that was paid? And the answer is there on the cross. The answer is there. What Jesus did when he died on the cross, we are told, was an act of mighty power and huge expenditure. If you like, our debt was paid by Jesus Christ and we go free.

Redemption. And atonement. You see the New International Version of the Bible, which is perhaps the one you've got from the back of the church. In verse 25, God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement. And it refers to his blood. Atonement is an English word made up, I think, by one of the early translators. And it means what it looks as though it means.

[30 : 25] At-one-ment. Two sides at each other's throats, offended, not talking to each other, whatever it is, brought one. Something to bring people together, to make an at-one-ment. That's the sort of English language aspect of it. But the original language, it works much the same.

It's to do with sacrifice. And if you had been brought up as a good Jew, if you'd read the law and the prophets, you would know how this all works. You would know that guilty sinners get involved with a sacrifice of atonement. And how do they get involved? Well, either themselves or somebody on their behalf will take an animal. This poor animal comes along and they put their hand on the animal. And you know that if you'd got a disease and you put your hand on somebody, you transfer the disease to them. You'd still have it, but they'd have it as well. Now this seems to work slightly differently. You put your hand on the animal and the sin that you have gets transferred to the animal and leaves you. That's how it seems to work. Because the animal now gets treated as a sinner. And in one of these blood sacrifices, the animal dies. The animal dies and you are in the clear.

You go free. You don't die. You live. That's the way the sacrifices of atonement work. There's lots more to it, but that's the basic principle. It's a principle of transfer. And this animal gets treated as you ought to have been treated and you go free instead. And what he is saying is, this is what happened on the cross. But instead of a snake being on the cross, like we were thinking at communion, or instead of a sheep being on the cross, or instead of a cow or some other domestic animal on the cross, you have a human being on the cross. And this person gets treated the way we should have been treated.

And the wrath of God, which says the wages of sin is death, the wrath of God descends on him. In all its awfulness, in all its fullness. And I don't think we're ever expected to calculate what that is. I think the hymn writer says rightly, we may not know, we cannot tell what pain he had to bear.

[33 : 29] Our salvation doesn't depend on us having some sort of imagination to comprehend exactly what he went through. We just know that he did go through it and that was enough. He had that on the cross so that we go free. And here are two words which very helpfully opened to us what was happening.

How does this problem get solved? Redemption. A mighty payment, a mighty act to set people free. And sacrifice of atonement. Someone being treated as I deserved, so that I should go free. And that, it says amazingly, is what happened to Jesus.

It wasn't an animal's blood, but his blood. God, can you believe that these words are in the Bible? God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement in his blood.

God, and on Facebook, you can like things, can't you? You can push the little button which says, I like that. And I wonder if you would press that button. Because that's quite a button to press.

Do we like the idea that somebody innocent got killed? Don't think we'd like that. Do we like the idea that God's own son had to be in a position of disgrace like that?

[35 : 07] I don't think we would like that. But I think the, he doesn't ask us to make a judgment on that. What he says is, don't worry about how disgraceful it was or how much it cost.

This is what I want you to know. I did it for you. And through his wounds, we are healed.

The punishment that we should have borne was on him. And he says, do you like that? Is that something brilliant?

Don't worry about the cost. Just accept the benefits. I did it for you. I did it for you. Will you have that?

Will you, will you take that? Will you say, yes, Lord? You know, it brings tears to one's eyes to think that that's how much it cost. But that's what it did cost, but he did it.

[36 : 11] Will you press the like button and say, thank you, Lord? Thank you for what you did for me. How is the problem solved?

And who benefits? Who benefits? Now, Paul has in mind, as he goes through this, two completely different ways of understanding religion.

Both of them with real life examples. Who benefits? Well, here's the first answer. Is it those who work and do the ethics, do the ritual, keep and observe the law?

So in verse 27, he says, what principle does this work on, on that of observing the law? Do you see that in verse 27? Is it to do with observing the law?

In verse 28, he says, is it to do with observing the law? Of course, that would be only the Jews could do that, because you had to be Jewish to really observe the law.

[37 : 20] And here's somebody observing the law, working really hard, building up an edifice, building up a building with building blocks, and even being circumcised.

So I forgot to put the blood there, just to emphasize that. Keeping the law. And he says, you know, this can produce despair, but it can produce pride.

So people can say, look, I'm going to be voted righteous by God because of how hard I've tried, because of how good I am.

You know, look at me, I'm the chairman of the golf club, and I've got a big car, got a very nice house, been photographed in Hello magazine, whatever it is, look at me.

Is it by doing the right thing, the good thing? Well, now to a lot of people, that's the way they think of themselves in life.

[38 : 22] I mean, you may be thinking the opposite. You may say, look at me, I'm not the chairman of the golf club, look at me. I wouldn't dream of having a big house, look at me. You might be doing it in all sorts of ways. But we feel that we've earned it by how well we've done.

And we boast. And Paul says, is that the principle by which we benefit? And I have to say, that for most people, they'd say, well, of course that'd be it.

Of course that's what religion is. Of course it is. You do whatever your religion says. You go to church, you know, at least once a year.

You might say a prayer. You might go to communion. But you clock it up. And that's of course how it works. But Paul says, no, that's not how it works.

Who benefits? Paul is at pains to say, it is not answer one.

[39 : 27] So I've got my pen, I'll put a little cross there, meaning not that answer. It works on a completely different principle. Verse 22, he says, this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who, what's the word?

Believe. And in verse 26, he says, he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, to be just, and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

And he says it in verse 30. Since there is one God who will justify the circumcised, that's the Jews, by faith, and the uncircumcised, the other lot, by faith.

So this is totally opposite to what people think. But what he's saying is, for the vilest sinner, the worst sinner, that you can think of, that might actually be you, but it might be somebody else, there is justification, leave the court without a stain on your character, go free, set free, redeemed, atoned for, there is that, not, not, because of how well you've lived, but, because of what Jesus died, what Jesus did, in this mighty act of redemption.

Now you might well find that very offensive. And if you don't find it offensive, I know there are a lot of people who do, because they would say, if you preach that in, in the church, you're going to ruin the church.

[41 : 28] If you tell people that, people will, you know, what will happen to the, the chairman of the golf club, he won't come along anymore. I'll tell you what will happen, if you preach that, people who are sinners, will find their burdens are lifted.

People who are sinners, will find that God says, lift up your head, you're forgiven. That people who have the deepest, darkest secrets, can relate to other people, as brothers and sisters, because they all know, they've all been forgiven.

So which of those answers, are you going to live by? Is it the trying, keeping, observing, which leads to, leads to all sorts of unhealthy, things like boasting and pride, and looking down on other people?

Or are you going to live by the trusting route, which actually, leads people to be absolutely amazed, that God could do something like that, for them?

And instead of people being proud, and looking down, they say, Lord, I am just amazed, that you did that for me.

[42 : 47] How wonderful you are. And to look on other people, in a completely different light. Not just to think, I'm better than them, but to think, how can I serve them? Which route are you going down?

Which would you opt for? The trying route, or the trusting route? Because Paul says, here's the wonder of it.

God justifies those who put faith, who trust him. And why, was the last question. Why does he do it? So you'll tire of me, putting it this way. Does he do it this way, because people deserve it? To which the answer is, absolutely no. Absolutely no.

How does he justify these people? Verse 24, it says, they are justified, freely, by his grace. Just take note of those words.

[43 : 48] Freely, means without a cause. A friend of my dad's said, he was walking down the beach, and somebody just came, punched him in the mouth, for no reason at all. He said, what did you do to him?

I didn't do anything, he just came and punched me in the mouth. Broke my teeth. No reason. Why does God justify sinners? Why does he justify you?

No reason. No reason in you. I'm glad he didn't come and punch us in the mouth, he comes and blessed us with salvation. What have you done to deserve it?

Nothing. By his grace. Grace means God being kind to people, not only who don't deserve it, but who deserve the opposite.

And God says, I'm going to find a way, I'm going to make a very deep plan, and I'm going to do all that's necessary, and it really is a lot, so that I can take sinners and bless them, just because I want to bless them.

[45 : 01] Why? Not because anybody deserves it, but really for God's glory. for people to say, for people to say, now and certainly in the world to come, what an amazing God God is.

How great. How just. Because he hasn't contravened his justice, all the debts have been paid, but it's just paid by somebody else.

How just. How kind. How wise is God. For God's glory. And for sinners.

Because through this amazing work of Jesus Christ, who was long prophesied, but now at a certain point in time, came and died on the cross, because he did that, God can look at you and me and say, go free.

Justified. Not guilty. And having said that, one day he will say, glorified. Come and be with me forever.