

The Gospel Still Works

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[0 : 00] Father, I confess before you that Romans 3, 21 to 31 is a deep and profound verse that speaks of mysteries that I cannot get my mind completely around.

And I, Father, we confess before you that no human being can fully grasp the mystery of what your Son accomplished for us on the cross. So, Father, we thank you that it is not up to our minds to completely and utterly grasp what you have taught us through your word.

You call us, Father, to use the best that is within us, but our best, Father, always depends upon your Holy Spirit, not only helping us to do the best, but to go beyond what our minds can do.

And so, Father, we ask that you would bless us this morning by pouring out your Holy Spirit upon us so that we might hear your word about your Son addressed to your people in your city, in your world, and that we might hear it all to your glory.

Father, do that wonderful work within us and pour out your Holy Spirit upon us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. So, when this church, the pastor moved away to Toronto and they were going to seek a new minister to replace the minister who'd left, Kent Doe, the bishop asked me if I would apply to this parish.

[1 : 31] And so, as part of the application process, I had to send in a resume. And as part of the resume, you know, I had to put down my experience and all that type of thing. And I can't remember, but there were a couple of questions that I had to answer that talked a little bit about my view of ministry and other things and sort of my aspirations and my plans and my hopes.

And I submitted it. And after I submitted it, the parish decided they didn't even want to interview me. I'm not making that up. They didn't even want to interview me. And so that was that.

They thought my resume, my experience, my aspirations didn't measure up to what they wanted.

They wanted something different. And I'll tell you, maybe over coffee for some of you, but you might wonder how on earth it is that I ended up becoming the rector of the church if they didn't even want to interview me for the position.

And there's lots of scars all over the place as part of that process. But at the end of the day, after about a year or so of them continuing to search, the bishop, with the permission of the wardens, now I'm talking, for those of you who aren't Anglican, and that's a little bit of Anglicanese.

But basically, wardens are the people, two of the three people in the older Anglican structure that are the legal trustees of the church. And the bishop with the two legal trustees, I was imposed on the congregation against the congregation's will.

[2 : 58] And that's how I became the rector of this parish. And I mention that because it's actually a really helpful way for us to understand how the world views Christianity and how most people understand religion and spirituality.

Because, in fact, how most of us understand, the natural way for us to understand religion and spirituality is something like us preparing a resume for whatever the higher power or whatever God is.

We prepare some type of, you know, we're living our lives preparing a resume. And just as in resumes that we submit for jobs that we want, we leave out all of the naughty stuff that we've done.

We put down, I mean, most people do, they leave out the naughty stuff, and they put down the things that they think they're particularly good and that meet the expectations.

And usually there's a section for your aspirations. I mean, you haven't actually accomplished this yet, but you hope you accomplish it. And, you know, religions and spiritualities differ on what should be on the resume.

[4 : 07] And so part of the criticism of the world about the Christian resume is that the Christian resume is boring. Who on earth would want to have the Christian resume? Like, what's all of these

hang-ups about sex?

And why is it that, you know, the Christians are hung up about abortion and other types of things like that? And so, and then, of course, Muslims, they have their own list of resume that has to be accomplished, connected to the Quran, and other traditional religions have their own particular things that need to be on the resume for them to get the approval of their God.

And those of us who are putting together their own spiritualities or what would be common in the world, they would just say that the content of the resume has to be completely different from everything that other traditional religions say, that maybe it should be that you don't go to Tim Hortons, but that you go to Bridgehead and you vote green.

I mean, I don't know what it is, but you'll have your own particular different resume. But basically, every human normal, the natural tendency of the human mind, whether you're a pagan, a Muslim, those brought up in Christendom, Jews, postmodern people wandering around Ottawa, they basically conceive of, we basically conceive of religion and or spirituality as being composed of forming a resume for that time when we need it.

And that's one of the reasons why that there are many people in the world who've completely and utterly given up on religion. They completely turn their back on it. They say, the whole idea that I have to provide some type of a resume to make it into, in God's favor is just completely abhorrent to them.

[5 : 41] They say, George, that's, you know, they might not say it to me directly, but internally they'll say, like, why in earth should anybody even bother? I'm just going to fail at any type of resume, you know, performance.

And so, you know what? Sleep in on a Sunday, get up when you feel like getting up, there's football games on a Sunday afternoon, get out the chips, get out the beer, get out the hard stuff, get together with a few friends, and there's really not much more to life than having fun and having friends.

And I, and I sense, you know, a plague on people who are spiritual, a plague on people who are religious, really the meaning of life is to completely ignore any attempt to make a resume, but just to have fun and, if possible, to have friends at the same time.

And, and, and the Christian, and so often when Christians try to share the gospel in a context where we basically are looking at resume performance and many of our friends and coworkers have given up on the entire resume procedure completely and utterly, the Christian view actually seems to be a bad option because not only do we have to have the resume that involves things like sex and money and time and going to boring church services and all of that type of stuff, but at the end of the day, God just lets you in.

And it's sort of a little bit like, George, the church didn't want to even interview you after they saw your resume, but the bishop just imposed you on the congregation.

[7 : 13] That's what it sounds like, all this stuff about Jesus and everything like that, is that God just picks a few people in the world and he says, okay, these guys, I'm going to impose these guys, I'm going to just pull them into heaven, doesn't matter what the resume says, I just want them and all these other poor suckers who are trying to build their resumes and it doesn't seem to make sense to people when we understand, if we come to the Bible and if we come to life from the perception of trying to build our resume, the Bible sort of makes sense sometimes when it talks about goodness, but then when it talks about the cross, and what Nora just read today, it just seems as if it's just God being unfair and picking some people and that's why many people choose to not be religious or spiritual at all because they said, I went all the way through life that when they picked teams, I was never picked first, I don't even want to get into this game with God.

So, is that what the Bible teaches? There's many people who understand Christianity in terms of resume performance and writing. Is that what the Bible actually teaches? Is that what real Christianity is? The text today that Nora read is a very, very powerful alternative to all understandings of spirituality and religion as involving creating a resume.

And so, it would be very helpful if you could have your Bibles, and I have to confess it in the sermon, I'm not going to use the King James Version, I want it to try to be as clear as possible, and in fact, in a moment, we're going to have a text up on a screen, but the Bible text speaks directly into this natural human tendency to understand that God wants us to create a resume so that we will be accepted for the position of being one of his favorites in heaven.

And it's Romans chapter 3, verses 21 and following, and here's how the text goes. Now, that is really, really, really complicated language, and it's not the way we usually speak, but we'll just go back and I'll just explain a few things, just very simple.

When it says that the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, what the righteousness of God is saying here is that just that God is right, and it's saying something deeper about God than that God is good.

[9 : 44] It's saying that God is right, and it's just, there's a rightness about God, and there's a rightness about God connected to morals, but there's a rightness to God connected to beauty, and there's a rightness to God connected to justice, and there's a rightness to God connected to mercy, and there's a rightness and a fittedness to God when it comes to truth, that there's just, that God, that God is right, and it far goes beyond just a moral code.

There's just a rightness of God, the God who really does exist, a rightness to him, and the God who has always been, there's a rightness about God, and it's been like that from all eternity, but he manifested, he made clear his rightness in a very, very public way when he sent his son to earth to die upon the cross, and it's in his son dying upon the cross that we really see revealed to the world what God has always been, that there's something right about God, but now the rightness of God has been manifested, and when it says apart from the law, although the law and prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe, here it's saying that there's two different ways that people can read the Bible, and one way to read the Bible is to read the Bible from the perspective that I have to write a resume for God to approve of me, and that's one way to read the Bible.

I come to the Bible with my natural human perspective, and I'm looking all the way through in the Bible for the things I need to have in my resume. Okay, I've got to be baptized. Okay, I haven't got that done yet.

Okay, I'm going to have to speak to the pastor after church so we can get that crossed off the list, and I have to honor my parents. Gosh, that's going to be really hard for me. I'm going to really have to talk to the pastor about what I have to do about that so I can cross that off my list.

So there's one way of reading the Bible which is all about resume writing, and he's saying that what he's going to do to manifest the rightness of God is going to be completely and utterly separate from the resume writing project.

[12 : 01] It's going to have nothing to do with it, but that if you read the Bible the way that God had always intended, you'd understand that what he's going to do to manifest that he's right is what he, that all the way along the Bible was being written in such a way for us to understand that there's something about us human beings, and God's going to try to make clear to us the mystery of what it means to be a human being, to put us on the path of understanding the mystery of what it means to be a human being, and that when we start to understand that, we'd realize that only God can make us right with himself.

And that's why it says here, it goes on to say in verse 23, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Actually, at this point, Andrew, could you put the text up? Some of you are used to the fact that I do this sometimes.

In some ways, I only have a one-point sermon today, and my one-point sermon is verses 23 to 25a, and all I'm going to do is try to really help you to understand verses 23 to 25a, and so I'm going to have a few other little things for you to remember, but could you say this text of Scripture with me right now?

For all have sinned and lack the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

That's my one point. I was trying, I spent a long time trying to write that in my own words, and I realized, you know what, I just want to try to, if all you get out of today's sermon is a bit of an understanding of that and a bit of a memory of that, then I have done what God requires of me, because it's always far better for you to remember what God says than what George says.

[13 : 54] In fact, the great danger always in preaching is that people leave churches wondering, spectacular preacher, they tell you all about the stories that the preacher said, and then if you ask them what was the Bible text on, they go, I don't know, that's a good question.

I don't know, what was the Bible text? Was there a Bible text? And every time you come to a church and you go away remembering the stories but don't have any idea about the Bible text, I or any

other minister have failed.

So one of the things you can do is just pray for me that you'll remember the Bible after coming to church and you'll have met with Jesus and you won't remember George. Please pray for that for our church into the future.

Please pray for me for that. So anyway, so here's this thing and it looks very odd. It has odd language. So here's the first way, first thing we're going to say to help you to understand what he says here when it says, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Andrew, if you could put up the first point, Paul begins with a very odd thing. He begins by saying in a sense, I am human and I lack the glory of God.

[15 : 01] In fact, he says, we're all human beings and we all lack the glory of God. Lacking the glory of God is a literal way of translating fall short of the glory of God.

It's how you translate the Greek literally. And it's a very, very odd thing actually that Paul's going to get to the heart of the proper way to read the Bible and how the rightness of God is manifested that he begins by reminding us that we're human.

and it's hidden in the imagery there which is not always easily achieved by us when we see it but that's exactly the very first step that he takes.

I am human and I lack the glory of God. Imagine if every morning when we woke up we said that. Imagine that in every conflict we have with our spouse or our parent or our friends or our boss we were to pause and say I am human and I lack the glory of God.

I am human and I lack the glory of God. You know if you ask most people in Canada what heaven is like or what happens after you die they will tell you we will maybe tell each other that we go to a better place.

[16 : 21] And if we don't say that we go to a better place we'll say that we will remember that person always in our hearts. And heaven is a mental place an emotional place a spiritual place but it has nothing to do with our bodies and it has nothing to do with how we live our lives because most Canadians would say that as long as there's one or two or three people who like you then you go to a better place and we remember you in our hearts.

But Paul doesn't talk about us being just minds or just emotions or just spiritual. He goes and he reminds us that we are human and we lack the glory of God.

He touches on the grand narrative of the Bible because ultimately the Bible has one ultimate author and because there is one ultimate author it tells a story and it's a story in six parts.

It tells us the story in the words of Genesis 1 in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth or in the words of John chapter 1 in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God.

He was with God in the beginning. All things were made by him and without him nothing was made that was made. And the beginning of the story is that God makes all things and he makes all things good and the second act of the story is that human beings decided that they did not want to just be creatures living in God's created order but that our spiritual ancestors Adam and Eve representing us because we're entailed in them and every human being has replicated that decision that we decided that we would be as gods that we would not wake up and say I am human but we would wake up and say I am God I am like God and in fact that's still the human problem isn't it that most of us in our anger in our impatience in our irritation in our dreams in our boasting our boasting is that we are a god that it's hard for us to say to ourselves I am human and the bible in this overarching story describes that human beings are not only made good but that human beings are made in the image of God they bear the image of God and because they are made in the image of God who is right and who is glorious that every human being was made glorious and not only was there in a sense something glorious about every human being because they are made in the image of God ultimately the true glory of human beings came in that every human being was a reflection of the glory of God think more of a perfect mirror perfectly pointed to the light rather than being a flashlight and that when human beings turned so this is one of those moments where it's good to have spotlights and when every human being turned from the glory of God made in the image of God to reflect the glory of God and when human beings turned from that and decided that they would rather be like gods and therefore look down on the created order the mirror turned its back on the light and there is now darkness we lack the glory of God

[19 : 51] I am human lack the glory of God for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God for all have sinned and lack the glory of God and this Bible text then this is I don't think that there is any

sociology political ideology religion or spirituality which is as true to human experience as this even though we don't like it but I don't think there is anything as wise and insightful as this that explains on one hand why you see this text is not saying that we are as bad as we can possibly be but it is telling us that the damaged image within us touches everything that we are which is why on one hand we still do some good things but every good thing we do there is always this touch of sin in it and we human beings we know that we know that even when good times are going on in our life we know that there is a cloud that will come that they will come to an end that evil that having turned our back on God to be as gods ourselves that that touches everything in some small way or sometimes in a huge way

Stalin and the killing of tens of millions of Ukrainians and China and Mao Zedong killing maybe up to 50 million Chinese and the Armenian genocide and the Rwandan genocide and Cambodia and one third of the population killed and sometimes the evil isn't just a tiny little bit but it's it's it's godlike with a small g demon like in its immensity but the Bible here isn't saying that human beings are as bad as they can possibly be but that it the lack of the glory of God touches everything that we are and on one hand it means that there is in every human breast some longing and yearning for heaven some longing or yearning for that time when we bore the image of God unbroken and were pointed towards the glory of God and therefore reflected the glory of God yet at the same time we lack the glory of God and here is the huge problem we cannot leave ourselves to fix ourselves have an out of body experience it's still you and your out of body experience think that politics can solve it listen

I lack the glory of God it doesn't mean we lack the glory of God any better if we have a million people making the decision if a million people lacking the glory of God make the decision it's still going to be a decision lacking the glory of God and we cannot leave ourselves to fix ourselves and Paul is here talking now about human beings embodied and with minds and hearts and wills and depths and because human beings aren't just isolated autonomous individuals but we come in families and in societies and cultures it's talking about us being social and because we human beings don't just float around in the clouds with no environment it means how we relate to the environment and how we relate to the planet and it means how we relate to those who are before us and it means how we relate to those who are going to come after us and I am human I lack the glory of God and so do you and I think there are a few things more empirically true or more wise than for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God no matter how unpopular it is when you think about it and look at it it is only an entrance into wisdom could you

Andrew put the scripture text up again want to say this text with me again my one point for all have sinned and lack the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith so the proper way of reading the Bible that shows the rightness of God first wants us to be able to say I am human and I lack the glory of God and then it wants us to say Andrew if you could put up the second point only God's just grace can save me all of me only God's just grace can save me all of me just for a moment I you know you don't if those of you have your Bibles if just beyond that quote listen to how it continues this was to show God's rightness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins it was to show his rightness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus you see we tend to understand grace as cutting giving us slack but giving one person slack is unjust to other people you know one moment God you're saying that George could be the rector of this parish even though they reject his resume are you saying God that you're just going to reject some people's resumes but not everybody's resume like what is it are these the people who are like the teacher's pet and they've sucked up to you somehow like how do we react to teacher's pets some of us say dang it how come they became the teacher's pet and I didn't how come they're better at you know snuggling up to the teacher you know in a metaphorical way than I am and the rest of us loathe teacher's pets and so grace can't just be God cutting some people's slack because we all know that's not fair I remember there's been different times I've asked my kids you know after I go to these I've gone to lots of graduation ceremonies and you know here's where I get to sound like an old man when I was in school I think when you graduated you just graduated but now the ceremony there's a they give like they give about 273 awards and you know but anyway when it comes to the more academic ones [26 : 09] I sense sometimes my kids how come they won that award and they'll say teacher's pet teacher's pet that's why they got it and it's not fair right so if on one hand if it is the fact that I am

human I lack the glory of God and I can never leave myself to fix myself and I come to the point that only God can do it but God is not worthy of being God if he's not just just as we don't think highly of teachers who show favoritism because certain kids suck up to them and we don't think of them as exemplary teachers and in fact if we were parents and had some choice we would avoid having our kids have that teacher as their teacher or maybe I'm just really old fashioned and anal but I think it would be common and so how is it that God can be just and at the same time save us that's what the rest of the verse is going to tell us

Andrew if you could put up our one point again that would be very helpful and could you all say it with me again for all have sinned and lack the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith I just came Andrew if you could put up the next point which is justified made right with God by Jesus so in that long sentence and you want to try to figure out what it means justified means made right with God by Jesus and there's sort of a bit of a declaration I just came from my synod which is Anglican speak for like my denominational meetings and Dick and Daniel were there representing the lady and I was there as the clergy and it was in Vancouver and I remember after I think it was one of the first lunches I heard a couple of people talking about how they find it really hard when they go to things like this it was put on by a

Chinese parish the food was wonderful like the first day of synod we had this really good Chinese food the second day I like sushi just we sushi for lunch like it was spectacular yeah some of you are saying yes next time synods in Vancouver we might get a lot of volunteers to go there hoping to get basically as much sushi as you could eat and so one of the people said there's all sort of fruit and desserts and all that stuff you know that it was a Chinese congregation Chinese people were very very very very servant hearted and hospitable and anyway so I heard at the end of the lunch I heard a couple of clergy I think talking about how they were going like this it's so hard coming to these times when there's as much free food as you can possibly eat like this it's a hard thing to come to and instantly it flashed through my mind I used to have a multi million we used to have a multi millionaire who come to this church and I mentioned his name it's nothing embarrassing about his name was Tom and he would occasionally treat me by taking me out to eat and we would go to this like at the time the most expensive restaurant in

Ottawa and he was well known there and the first time I went I didn't want to choose the cheapest thing on the menu but I chose the second cheapest thing in the menu he asked me beforehand what I was going to order and he said George you're not allowed to order that you're not allowed to order that I want you to order the most expensive thing on the menu trust me I can cover this okay just order whatever you want he was the same guy I've never seen anybody else like it he was well known he has the menu and the waitress comes and she says hi Tom he says hi he said you know I don't like anything on this menu here's what I'd like the cook to make me here's what I'd like the cook to make me and she wrote it down and they brought it to him okay now here's the thing if I came home and told my wife and you that I had a free lunch I did not have a free lunch somebody has to pay there's no free lunch ever somebody has to pay a few years ago in the congregation we had a fellow a priest who'd come here from

Africa to do a master's degree at St. Paul University and through no fault of his own all of his funding fell out from underneath his feet and so the university they were on one hand very gracious to him they allowed him like at most places if you don't pay up your bills at the end of one term you can't take other courses but they allowed him to keep taking courses but he couldn't get any credit for them until he until it was made right it had to be made right and in that particular case it had to it means the money had to be paid and penalties had to be paid and until it was made right he wouldn't get the master's degree and until it was made right his bishop back home wouldn't be happy it had to be made right and this African fellow he just through no fault of his own he couldn't make it right and so we as a congregation not patting ourselves on the back we talked and it was like fifteen thousand dollars or something it was like more than that it was a lot of money and we made it right we collected the money no income tax receipts and we made it right so that he could be declared to be having it made right that all of the bills were paid all of the credits were properly accounted and he could graduate and it made it right with the bishop with the university we made it right and that's what justified means it's telling us that when we look at Jesus' death upon the cross that what we see

[32 : 25] God doing the God who is right that on the cross God is providing a way to make it right for us human beings to be right with himself and he is making it right he's paying the penalties and all of the other things that have to go on and it's a mystery but that's how we're to understand the cross that we can't make it right ourselves but God makes it right and he declares that it's made right just as the fellow from Africa he needed the university to declare that it was made right so that whoever it was the other part of the university could grant him the degree he needed that to be made right with a declaration and that's what the Bible is saying here is that when you see the word justified here is that it's Jesus making it right not for himself but for us on our behalf as a bit of a declaration

Andrew could you could you put that text up again for us please could you all say it with me again for all have sinned and lack the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith justified justified made right with God by Christ as a result of God's grace as a gift and then it goes on and talks about redemption which is a very very funny type of an image one of the things about resume writing is that resume writing is really boasting isn't it in fact if you go to a resume writing helper and they look at your resume they would actually

I mean they don't use this language right especially here in Canada because we have our own peculiar Canadian way of boasting but they say there must be other things you can boast about that you haven't included in here I mean they don't use the word boast but isn't that what it is there must be other things you can boast about and you know so you can boast in the fact that you have a degree or multiple degrees and you can boast about this experience and this connection and in some ways even your aspirations are a type of boasting and actually one of the things if you just read down a little bit further in verse 27 after this section that we just kept quoting the Bible is going to say that remember I said that the gospel is a complete and utter rejection of the resume writing approach to understanding the religious life or the spiritual life and in fact it makes it very clear verse 27 then what becomes of our boasting it is excluded that whatever it is that God is doing to make us right has nothing to do with boasting but here's the problem with boasting when we boast about things it shows what we put our hope and our trust and our confidence in

I can handle this you know we say we're going into a hard situation I can handle this because I'm strong that's what I say to myself maybe right we I can handle this it doesn't matter if I forget certain things I can handle this because I have a credit card and I have a credit limit I can handle this job because I got the education it shows what we put our trust and our faith in but the problem is that the very same things that we put our trust and our faith in often let us down my resume they didn't get me hired here and so the very same things that we boast in are often the exact same things that cause us anxiety in our lives is it enough is it enough and so many of us especially in a culture like ours which is so geared towards boasting in a properly humble low-key Canadian way that's so organized around resume writing and qualifications and ultimately boasting it's also we are in a culture which is profoundly anxious and the other thing that makes us profoundly anxious is that most of us when we wake up in the morning do not say

I am human and I lack the glory of God we go through our day thinking that we are like God a couple of weeks ago I shared with you that I was behind a car that said why it had a bumper sticker on it that said why am I the only good driver on the planet or no why am I the only one on the planet who knows how to drive that's what it said why am I the only one on the planet who knows how to drive and probably 80% of the men here in the room are thinking one moment I can't speak for the women you can talk about that at coffee hour so I don't know if women laugh at it because they realize that's how their husbands or their fathers would act or if that's something they think but it could be whether it's driving or something else when we used to have a building about every three or four years there'd be a fight usually amongst the women about how to organize the kitchen some new whippersnapper and whether that whippersnapper was 22 or 62 some new whippersnapper would come in and say this isn't the right way to organize a kitchen the pot shouldn't be here and the cup shouldn't be there and this shouldn't be there and the food shouldn't be there and this fridge is filthy and the how dare you say that this fridge is filthy

[38 : 21] I think if you had a bumper sticker why I'm the only one on the planet who can keep an order well keeping house the guys would say yeah I don't know maybe that person is but you know it's whatever the thing is okay I've probably gotten some people mad at me with my analogies but the fact of the matter is is that we are deeply seated this idea that we are God and not only then is

this idea of resume writing the things we put our confidence in is that causes anxiety but at the same time our basic desire to be God causes us a type of fundamental anxiety and so one of the things about this text Andrew if you could put up the point redemption means made free in God by Jesus God by Jesus that what we see when we see Jesus dying upon the cross God manifesting his rightness and that he's going to act to make us right with himself that one of the things he makes right for ourselves is that as the gospel grips us we are made free made free from idols made free from the things that we put our confidence in all of the things which cause that there's a basic type of bondage that we have to being like a

God ourselves that there's a type of bondage we have when we the things that we put our trust in to give us confidence and they cause us anxiety that the gospel Jesus is going to try to dethrone all of those things and he dethrones all of those things in his death upon the cross for us some of the things that we put our confidence in actually creates a type of addiction the young man who says I'm so worried about this math test I'm so worried about my stress and they have this idea that if they can just look at some pornography and maybe some sexual stimulation that it reduces their anxiety to help them focus they think so they can do better in their math test or they can do better in this conversation or whatever it is that they have to do not realizing that they're setting in stage something that can make them an addict the man or woman who says I and so they know of what they know can see if you might wonder how do these things fit together how does justified fit with redeemed and propitiation and forgiveness which we're going to talk about in a moment And sometimes, I know for many years I had a problem with this, because I was trying to think, okay, so I'm made right with God because he pays the penalty, and that sort of makes me free, and then it sort of deals with propitiation, which then sort of deals, and I try to, here's the thing, if you just remember this, is that the Bible uses a variety of images to try to let us know what it is that Jesus accomplishes on the cross for us.

And so, we don't have to go, how does redeemed connect to justified, or justified connect to propitiation, or forgiveness connect to being redeemed.

Every one of them are different images to help us understand what Jesus does on the cross. Don't try to link them apart from the cross. And as you go on, you see images of adoption, and images of Jesus being the victor, and images of Jesus as the mighty warrior.

[42 : 18] All of these things, we only understand them as that the mystery of the cross, and what Jesus accomplishes for us, it's so deep, that many images are needed to bring it home to us.

And some of the images make a difference to us at different times in our lives. For those of us who struggle with addictions, the idea that in Jesus, I can be free might be very, very powerful.

For those of us who struggle with failure, and how we're going to deal with the creditor, and how we're going to deal with this, and all the demands upon us, the idea that we are justified might be very, very powerful.

And the very, very next image, for those of us who've maybe grown up with a very, very angry father, or a very, very angry child, or angry co-worker, angry neighbor, this whole idea that somehow or another Jesus deals with anger, that as that grips us, it helps us to understand God's love for us.

And so these different words aren't to be understood as separate from the cross of Jesus. They're all understood as words to help us enter into the mystery of the cross, and the mystery of the cross helps us to understand each word.

[43 : 25] Andrew, could you put up our one point today, this scripture text? Could you say this with me, please? For all have sinned and lack the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God has put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

Could you put up the point about propitiation, please? Propitiation means the penalty paid and forgiven in Jesus. I just finished reading a novel about a group of a war between two different biker gangs, and one biker gang kills the delivery guy bringing in, you know, seven or eight million dollars of meth and a whole pile of cash.

But in the way that he dies, the drugs get lost, it gets discovered by a 12-year-old boy, and I won't say anything more in case you end up reading the book. But at the heart of it, at the heart of it is that there starts to be lots of death, because the drug, the outlaw, the biker gang, they want satisfaction.

They're angry. They want satisfaction. They want the people who've stolen, that killed their drug runner, they want him dead. And the people who stole their drugs and have their drugs, even though it's just a 12, they don't know that it's a 12-year-old boy, that's part of what drives the whole story.

But whoever it is, they want him to pay for what he's done. And they want it, they're angry, and their anger won't be stopped until things have been made right, and that the kid has, whoever it is, has paid for what they've done, and something else, and they get things back, and things are restored to the way that it properly should be.

[45 : 14] And so some of you know that the word propitiation talks about God's anger and his need for satisfaction, and it's very hard in our culture because when we hear this, we're very worried in the back of our mind about anger-driven individuals, and even this cultural narrative, where often it's the drug lords or the mafia that want satisfaction.

But we have to understand this image in a different way. Quite a few years ago, so in elementary school, for one of our kids, we had to go, you know, you go to meet the teachers, and you see the report cards, and my wife and I were curious about why there was this thing said about one of our kids, and it was when they were, I think, in grade one or something like that, and it talked about them, sort of a little bit about their social, not being socially adapted, and a few other things, and Louise and I were really puzzled about it.

We don't think our kids are perfect, but we were just really puzzled about this comment because it sounded really out of character about our child, and if it was true, we'd like to know about it, but we were curious, and so the teacher said, oh, that's because there was an older kid bullying another kid, and your child told the teacher about it, and I'm getting angry, and I said, and that's why he got a bad report?

This is before bullying was a big thing. Hard to believe now, right? Yes, he didn't handle it right. It sows his lack of social adaption and people skills that he told the teacher.

I'm getting mad. I try to control my anger. We have a frank conversation. Now, I never actually got satisfaction about that, but, you know, what did I want there?

[47 : 07] I mean, it's actually now in this, with all the thing about bullying, and it's actually hard to believe that a teacher would say that, would actually give a child a lower mark because he told the teacher that an older child was bullying a younger child, but that's actually what happened.

What did I want? I was angry, and what did I want? I wanted satisfaction. Like, really, if I could have managed it, I wanted that, I wanted the thing, that the mark changed, and I would have liked the teacher disciplined, and I probably would have liked the teacher to have some type of counseling or retraining, and I probably, and I would have wanted the bully dealt with.

Now, none of those things happened. None of those things happened. And so, that's just one of those things in life where you have to forgive, right? You have to forgive.

You tell your child that they did the right thing. They're never going to get in trouble with you for telling a teacher that an older child is bullying a younger child. They did the right thing, and you just have to swallow, in a sense, the anger.

You have to, in a sense, just absorb it into yourself. So, that's what propitiation here means. God is not like a crime lord, and he just wants to inflict terrible carnage on the world until he gets his toys back, and he can be the Lord.

[48 : 29] But he sees real evil, and rather than having the real evil be carnage on the human race, he forgives.

He takes that on himself. And then what we see when Jesus dies upon the cross is God, God making the penalty being paid, the order restored, forgiveness happening, and it all happens in Jesus taking our place.

Because if God tried to, if the anger, if the just punishment of God fell on me, it would unmake me. And God, in his grace and mercy and love, sees that, and so he sends his son to take my place.

Andrew, could you put the scripture text up again, the Romans 3, I mean, the 23 to 25? Could you say this with me? For all have sinned and lack the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

Here's the thing. It's actually far harder for those of us who are pretty good people to understand this text than those of us who've had very, very messed up lives.

[49 : 58] When it says that we are to receive, that on the cross we are justified, that on the cross we are redeemed, that on the cross God's, that we, that Jesus becomes our propitiation for us, there is something deep within us that wants to say to God that you've got to look at my resume.

God, I have a pretty neat resume and surely my resume must matter in some way. But the word faith and grace means that we have to be able to in a sense, I shouldn't be holding the Bible, I should hold my book, that I can't be going to God and saying, God, look at this.

Like surely this must add up to a little bit, be worth something. But if I understand that I am human and lack the glory of God, I depend upon God to act in a just and fair way to do what I cannot do, that faith at the end of the day means putting this all aside and realizing I have to stand naked before God and say that I have nothing to add and I can do nothing myself, that I have to depend completely and utterly for what you will provide for me in the person of Jesus on the cross.

And fortunately, this is not just some, we don't have to get it perfect for God to accept us, but the tiniest little bit of a sliver of us recognizing that only God can do this, God takes it.

And the Christian life begins when we have the tiniest sliver of an acknowledgement that God has to do this so we can't do it ourselves. And our growth in our Christian life, partly our growth in being redeemed and free in Jesus is to realize that we can do nothing on our own to make us right with God, that we have to completely and utterly depend upon what God does for us in the person of his son to make us right with himself.

[51 : 50] There's nothing else that we can do. That in fact, there's just nothing else that we can do. And one of the things about this text of scripture that's so powerful is that the word justified is in the future in the original language.

That means that when we put our faith and trust in Jesus, we can know today what God will say to us when we die and appear before him face to face. And that means that he's saying that we're justified in Jesus.

If I live another 40 years, all the 40 years worth of resume writing stuff, he's already declared me right with him. It's all irrelevant. That I can know when I put my faith and trust in Jesus that God will take him instead of me, use him to see me, and he will declare me right with himself.

He makes me right with himself, and I have nothing that I can do to add to it. And that's why the gospel creates such glorious liberty, that when this truth starts to grip us, I don't know if this congregation will be 500 people, 5,000 people, 25 people in the future, and I, you know, if it was 5,000, I would be sure something I would think that I could boast about that would make me somehow more valuable to God, but all of that, it's completely and utterly irrelevant to God.

There's nothing about my resume that makes me right with him. It's all about what Jesus does for me on the cross. And as that truth grips us, it gives us the chance, the opportunity to risk, that we can risk new things as a congregation because our success or failure isn't going to depend upon how God receives us.

[53 : 41] We already know his final word about it, and it means that we can start to look at the fact that we, why is it that we are so addicted to pornography, or why is it that we, when we're under a lot of stress, we have to go and buy an expensive handbag, or why is it that when we're under a lot of stress, we have to go driving and we get really mad and it's sort of cathartic.

And why is it that we do all of these things? And when we understand that our rightness with God does not depend upon our resume, that it's something freely and graciously given, it gives us the strength to take risks for the kingdom, to take risks in love, to take risks in being able to forgive a person who's wronged us.

It means that we can start to look at the idols of our hearts and what's going on inside of us and our weakness, and we don't have to be worried that we will see something within us that will make God want to turn himself away from us, that it will be something that will look bad on a resume because God pronounces when we put our faith and trust in Jesus at what is for us our death, he pronounces us right with him.

Not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offenses. Andrew, could you put up the final scripture text? Could you all stand, please? this is the overarching message of Romans.

Could you say it with me? For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

[55 : 05] For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written, the righteous shall live by faith. The righteous shall live by faith.

Those who are made right with God, whom God declares right with him, we receive it by faith, we live it by faith, we die by faith, it's all by faith.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Father, thank you for Jesus. Thank you for what he did for us on the cross. Thank you, Father, that on the cross as he died, he did what was needed so that we could be made right with you.

Thank you, Father, that on the cross as he died for us, he made it so that we could be redeemed from the things that bind us and put us in bondage, that we could be free in you.

Thank you, Father, that as Jesus died for us on the cross, that he provided our satisfaction, he is our propitiation, that he dealt with all of the things that are out of whack and punishment is needed and he dealt with all of these things on the cross for us.

[56 : 06] Father, make us disciples of Jesus who are gripped by the gospel and are therefore beginning to be freed up to live not for our own glory as if we are God's, but for your glory because you are the only God, you are the creator of all things, the sustainer of all things, the end of all things.

Father, make us disciples of Jesus gripped by the gospel to live for your glory and this we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.