

The Gift of God

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[0 : 00] with the Lord's table, we want to take time to reflect on what Jesus has done for us. And so we're turning to the letter that Paul wrote to the church at Rome this morning to do that.

Now, this letter of Paul's is a challenging letter. It's much easier to just read through the narratives of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, than it is to read through this letter.

This letter is packed. In fact, Paul is known for making the most of every word and not wasting any breath. He's got some of the longest sentences in the Bible.

And here, in this letter, he's making a case for some very important truths. And all of these important truths have to do with the Gospel, the good news of Jesus.

And he takes almost the entire letter to logically build his argument, and he touches these various truths and themes together throughout as he builds his argument to bring forth what he wants to say about the Gospel of Jesus.

[1 : 08] So it's hard to just dip into this book for a little bit this morning, but we can't just leave it off to the side and avoid it. So we're going to go into Romans this morning and do some work to try to dig into this and see something for ourselves here this morning.

Romans is all about the Gospel. It's all about the Gospel. And that's kind of an old word. Maybe some of you are like, what's the Gospel, you know?

It comes from an older English word, God spell, which literally, broken apart, means good news or message or word.

And this is what Paul wanted to tell the Roman Church about, the good news of Jesus. And not just the church at Rome. This good news that Paul is so eager to share, he's been preaching this all over the Mediterranean world, from city to city to city.

Now, what is the Gospel, this good news of Jesus? If you're a member, this is a question that we asked you last year during membership review, to put it into your own words.

[2 : 19] What is the Gospel? And some of you gave the more typical Sunday school answer, that Jesus came, died on the cross for our sins, to atone for them, so that we could be forgiven, and so that we could receive eternal life.

And that is the heart of the good news. But some of you others pointed to other things that are part of the larger story of the Gospel. Because the good news of Jesus is big.

It's not just a few little things that Jesus has done for us. It's a big, deep, rich, full package deal of blessing, and grace, and favor that comes to us through Jesus.

Let's listen to what Paul has to say about this back in the beginning of his letter. You can stay in chapter 3, it'll be on the screen here. Back in chapter 1, verse 14, he says, I'm obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.

That's why I'm so eager to preach the Gospel also to you who are in Rome. For I'm not ashamed of the Gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

[3 : 35] Proclaiming and sharing the good news about Jesus is Paul's calling, it's his mission, it's his passion. You can just hear it in his words.

But now after telling us this, we expect Paul to go on to share the good news, to tell us what is the Gospel about Jesus. And we half expect Paul to just maybe tell us the story, much like Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John did.

Paul, what's the Gospel? What's the good news of Jesus? Well, amazingly, this entire letter of Romans is Paul's answer to that question.

And he has a very different way of explaining and saying it than Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Why? Because the good news of Jesus, as I said before, it's more than just a few things that Jesus did for us.

It's a rich and deep, wonderful multitude of things that God has been planning from long ago and has now brought to pass through his son Jesus for the benefit of those who believe in him.

[4 : 50] So this is how Paul introduces the good news of Jesus here in Romans. He says, I'm not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.

He goes on, For in the Gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed. A righteousness that is by faith from first to last.

Now that's probably not the words that most of us would choose to describe the Gospel. Somebody asked you, What's the Gospel? Probably most of us would not be thinking in our minds, Let me tell you, It's the story of the righteousness of God.

But that's exactly how Paul answers the question. And then he begins to explain what he means by that. He goes on to explain in these first few chapters the big story of our world.

How mankind has rejected and rebelled against God. How man has been living unrighteously. And because of this, He says, All humanity stands guilty before God.

[6 : 14] God's justice hangs over us. It's been revealed that we deserve God's righteous wrath, says Paul.

His just punishment for the sins that we have committed. This is chapters 1, 2, and the first part of chapter 3. And in the midst of this, Paul also says, Just in case there are any of you who are thinking, Well, that doesn't apply to me.

Like, I'm a good person. I haven't been doing a bunch of wicked things and sinning. I'm not guilty of that. I've been keeping God's commands. I've been living a good, a righteous life.

Just in case anybody's thinking this, Paul says, For them, No. You too are guilty before God.

Because nobody has kept God's holy law well enough to be righteous in His sight. I'm paraphrasing. I'm summing it up here.

[7 : 20] Some of you, says Paul, are hypocritical, self-righteous, proud. You think you are good. You think you're righteous. But it's all an external show that you put on while in your hearts wickedness.

You're far from God. You don't love Him. You don't fear Him. No. Everybody, says Paul, is guilty before God.

Listen to how Paul says it here now in chapter 3, verse 9. We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin.

As it is written, there is no one righteous. Not even one. There is no one who understands. There is no one who seeks God.

All have turned away. They have together become worthless. There is no one who does good. Not even one. Their throats are open graves.

[8 : 26] Their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood.

Ruin and misery mark their ways. And the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

This is how it looks here on earth from God's point of view. Of course, we don't see it that way many times. We often think that we're pretty good.

We do our best to try to minimize our sins. But according to God's evaluation, as we just heard, not a single one of us is righteous before God in God's sight.

Not a single one of us is good like He is. Maybe you remember the time that a rich man came up to Jesus and asked Him a question. Mark chapter 10 verse 17.

[9 : 33] He said, Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus answered him and said, Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.

Jesus Himself, speaking the words of the Father, proclaimed this same truth that there is no one righteous, not even one.

We are all guilty before God. As we just heard, Paul goes on here in Romans to tell us how human beings have managed to sin with almost every part of their bodies.

I won't read it again. Their throats, their tongues, their lips, their mouths, their feet, their eyes. Do you hear this?

No one, not a single person is righteous. Paul goes on, verse 19. He says, We know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

[10 : 52] In other words, what was spoken at Mount Sinai was spoken to the Jews who were there. But it wasn't just for the Jews who were there. It was for the whole world that God said all that He said at Mount Sinai.

It was so that all of us would know and understand what God's just and righteous standard is. What true goodness is.

Verse 20. Therefore, Paul says, no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law. Rather, through the law, we become conscious of sin.

Do you hear this? No one, not a single person will be declared good or righteous by keeping commandments, by observing the law.

Why? Because none of us is able to keep it. We all fall short of that. We can't. So Paul says, rather, through the law, we become conscious of sin.

[12 : 06] What does the law do? One of the purposes of the law that God gave, this is the first books of the Bible. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy.

One of the purposes of the law is to show us that we are indeed sinners. That we fall short. that we are guilty before this holy God who created the world.

And this is probably one reason why we tend not to like the Old Testament and prefer the New Testament because it's true. Parts of the Old Testament are like that.

They're like a mirror that God is holding up to us saying, see, this is what you are. You are guilty. You are sinful.

You are deserving of justice. Let me encourage you at this point. Don't neglect the Old Testament.

[13 : 11] The books of the law, those scathing words of the prophets, we need them. We need them to become conscious of sin.

To become aware of where we truly stand before God. God. It's only there, looking in the mirror of the law, the righteous law of God, that we see our true need for the remedy that God has provided.

Let's hear about that remedy now. I'll go back and read this. Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law.

Rather, through the law, we become conscious of our sin. But now, says Paul, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been revealed to which the law and the prophets testify.

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There's no difference between Jew and Gentile for all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God.

[14 : 23] And all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. These are some of the most wonderful words in the whole Bible.

Do you hear what Paul is saying here? He's saying, I've just told you now the bad news. That we are all guilty before God. Deserving of God's wrath.

No matter how hard you try, you can never keep God's law and commandments well enough to be righteous in His sight. But now, listen, God has done something new through Jesus Christ.

There's good news. God has revealed His righteousness. a way to get a right standing with God.

And we don't get it through keeping the law, he says. It's apart from the law. We don't get it by trying to obey all of His commands better. No, this righteousness, this right standing with God is given by God to all who believe through faith in Jesus Christ, says Paul.

[15 : 33] This is the good news that I've been longing to tell all of you in Rome. God has sent Jesus and by believing in Him, by faith in Him, you can have a right standing with God.

You can be considered righteous in His sight. And it doesn't matter one bit whether you're a Jew or a Gentile, says Paul. Either way, you're a guilty sinner who falls short of God's glory and either way, you are justified.

You are made right in God's sight by faith in Jesus Christ as a gift of His grace. These are sweet words.

Do you hear what Paul is saying? Do you hear what God is speaking through this apostle here? Even though you, like everyone else, are guilty and deserve God's punishment, even though you are not righteous, you can be declared righteous.

And it's the gift of God to all who believe in Jesus, the Christ. I love the language of grace in Paul's words here.

[16 : 54] This is not a right standing with God that we get by doing good, by keeping commands, by earning it. In fact, all of chapter 4, which we won't go to today, is dedicated to making that crystal clear.

You can't earn it. It comes as a free gift, unearned. But to make this clear in this verse that we're looking at right here, Paul gives us a few different words that tell us of the gift, of the freeness of this gift.

Notice the language he uses here in verse 24. He says, all are justified freely by his grace. First, there's the word justified.

The word used here means to pronounce or to declare someone righteous. Not guilty. It means, with regard to justice, to give us that favorable verdict that we long for in the courts of God.

Not guilty. But of course, as we've just heard, that's not the verdict that we deserve. And so it doesn't come to us because we've earned it. It comes to us apart from what we've done for ourselves.

- [18 : 14] This points us in the direction of gift. But then Paul adds to this word. He says, we are justified, we are made righteous freely.

This adverb in the original language is actually the noun for gift. And then the ending is changed to just kind of make it into an adverb. Quite literally, it would be something like, all are justified giftly.

But we don't have that word in English, so it's translated freely as a gift. No strings attached. It's something given.

Not because it's been earned or deserved or worked for. Think about a gift. It's something that you just hand to someone. You give it to them.

Maybe you see that they're in need of something and you have that something and they can't get that something. They can't afford it maybe. But you have it and so you give it to them.

- [19 : 20] You just hand it over to them. Finally, there's the third phrase that Paul uses to make this clear that it's free, that it's a gift.

We are all justified freely by His grace. By His grace. I love that word. What is God's grace?

God's grace is His goodwill. It's His kindness. It's His benevolence. It's that favorable disposition that He has towards us.

The desire to meet our needs, to bless us, to treat us kindly, to do good to us. God's grace has to do with His generous, giving nature.

In fact, the word grace in the language of the New Testament is derived from a word that just means gift again or favor. So you bring all of these together and there's just no mistaking it here.

- [20 : 23] Even though we are all guilty, even though we all fall short of God's glory, says Paul, unrighteous, all of us can be made righteous in God's sight and we can have this as a free gift from God because of His goodness, His generous, kind, loving nature.

No works required, no law-keeping required, no strings attached. And what do we have to do to receive this gift? Well, Paul tells us all throughout this passage.

This right standing comes to us through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. That's it. Believe.

It's not what we must do as in earning it. We couldn't earn it. Instead, it's who we must trust. It's who we must believe.

This is an attitude of the heart. And we find out that it's not so much about what we can do to get this. It's about what God, what Jesus has done for us and us believing that by which we are brought into this right standing with God.

- [21 : 49] Notice the emphasis of Paul. This righteousness, this gift of God to be not guilty in his sight.

It comes through Jesus Christ. Here in verse 24, it came, the redemption comes by Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus. He says it again and again all through this gospel.

There is only one way to get a right standing with God and it's through Jesus Christ and what he has done for us. let's talk for a moment about what Jesus did to redeem us.

This is all driving to this central point, this central moment. How do we get a not guilty verdict with God through Jesus Christ?

Paul finally tells us what it is that Jesus has done in verse 25. He says God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood.

[22 : 56] We'll unpack this a little bit quickly here. Through the shedding of his blood, this right standing with God that we can have, it came by the death of Jesus. This is Paul's way of referring to the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross.

What happened when Jesus died on the cross? It was much more than just some political rebel being executed, which is what the world saw.

Paul tells us what happened in that moment. A sacrifice of atonement was being made. This points us back to the Old Testament and the language of atonement.

The sacrifices that were offered at the tabernacle and later at the temple to atone for the sins of the people. But notice here in verse 25 who brings the sacrifice.

It's not us, the guilty, but God, the gracious. God presented Christ as an atoning sacrifice, as a wrath removing sacrifice for our sins.

[24 : 12] and the benefits of this we receive by faith, by believing. There it is again. I'll finish off the verse here.

He did this to demonstrate his righteousness because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. He did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time so as to be just and the one who justifies.

those who have faith in Jesus. There's lots here but basically it amounts to this. God is in the business of leaving sins unpunished.

He has been doing it since the Garden of Eden, since the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through the days of Israel. None of them and none of us are righteous, not even one.

We've all sinned. We all fall short of God's glory. God has been leaving sins unpunished, but God's justice demands that all sins be punished.

[25 : 18] And so Christ came to take the punishment that they deserved long ago and the punishment that we deserve here today so we could be justified, given that right standing with God despite what we deserve.

God's death on Jesus' death on the cross was all about, says Paul. As Jesus hung there, he was offering a wrath-removing sacrifice for you and for me so that our verdict of guilty could be changed to not guilty and yet justice still be done.

And this is what we want to celebrate today as we come again to the Lord's table. Jesus' body, represented by the bread, was broken. He was killed.

He died. His blood that was shed represents his life given and poured out for us.

The greatest of all gifts was offered here at the cross to all who will believe, whether Jew or Gentile, a free gift, no strings attached, nothing needing to be done to earn it, to deserve it.

[26 : 44] You and me can have a right standing with God and be declared righteous forever. Our verdict changed and it comes through faith in Jesus the King and his suffering in our place and death at the cross.

Maybe you're here this morning and you're wondering why would he do that for a wretched sinner like me? Well, Paul's answer here is because of his grace.

He is that kind of a God. He is kind, good, gracious, there's real love in the heart of God for you and for me.

Do you believe it? The cross proves it. We're going to go to worship now.

We're going to sing. We'll have a chance through the songs to reflect on this and then we'll serve and partake of the table and we'll sing some more after that. We're going to partake now of the Lord's table and if you believe in Jesus that he is that sacrifice of atonement for your sins, then this table is open to you and I invite you to partake, to eat of the bread and drink of the cup when it comes around.

[28 : 18] I'll invite Dave and Charles to come forward and to serve the elements and we'll wait until everybody who wishes to partake has been served and then we'll eat and drink together all in unison.

wedding for But you Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[32 : 06] Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you so much for this gift that you have given to us. Lord Jesus, we thank you for being willing to suffer like you did.

We don't deserve it. But we are so grateful. We look forward to the eternity to heaven that you have purchased for us.

Life forever with you because of what you did for us. Thank you. We eat and drink in remembrance of you. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. do do do