

AM Romans 3:9-31 "Pictures of the cross"

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- [0 : 0 0] Now to the Word of God, reading in Romans chapter 3 from verse 9, I'm reading from the New International Version. Romans chapter 3 and verse 9.
- What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all. We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin.
- As it is written, there is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands, 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 an open grave, 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. The way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.
- [1 : 0 6] Now 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.
- Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law. Rather through the law we become conscious of sin. But now a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known, to which the law and the 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 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.
- God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. God 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. Where then is boasting?
- [2 : 2 0] It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.
- Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too. Since there is only one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.
- Do we then nullify the law by this faith? Not at all. Rather, we uphold the law. Amen. And may God add his blessing. This reading from his word.
- Let us pray. Our Heavenly Father, once again we bow before you. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory, our supreme concern.
- Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Amen. I'd like this morning to focus with you on that passage in Romans chapter 3 from verse 21 to 26.
- [3 : 4 1] And you might like to have that passage open before you. While I want to focus upon these verses, it's important to put these verses into the context of the whole book of Romans.

Romans, of course, this letter from Paul. He's writing to the church at Rome, a church that he hasn't at that point ever been to. And most commentators agree that he's setting out in Romans the gospel as he sees it.

And so the book is very structured. But before we come to these verses, I want to focus upon a wee bit of these earlier verses.

Paul, after his initial greetings, announces his theme in verses 16 and 17 of the first chapter. I am not ashamed of the gospel.

Because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. First for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed.

[4 : 50] A righteousness it is by faith from first to last. Just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith. The righteous will live by faith.

They will pass from death, spiritual death, to spiritual life as they trust in Jesus. But also they are to live moment by moment by faith.

And the theme of the book is this righteousness that God confers upon us. But before Paul then comes to talking about this righteousness that is conferred upon us through the work of Jesus, He deals with the problem.

The problem of sin. And it is actually quite interesting. If you were asked to explain the gospel to someone, how would you go about it?

Here is Paul explaining the gospel. And for the rest of chapter 1, the whole of chapter 2, and the bulk of chapter 3, Paul does not mention Jesus.

[6 : 02] He does not mention the Saviour. He deals with the problem that the Saviour came to deal with. The problem of sin. And he does so in a structured way.

Chapter 1, verses 18 to 32, he deals with the person who is obviously the bad man. You know, you have no problem looking at this person and saying, yes, they are sinners.

They commit all sorts of evil. The bad man. But then in chapter 2, and the first 16 verses or so, he deals with the good man.

Not the person who is outwardly bad, but the person who seems to live a reasonably decent life. And he establishes that they too are guilty before God.

And one of the arguments he uses is that wherein you judge another, you judge yourself. And one way of looking at it is, think of when you were born, there was a wee tape recorder inside you.

[7 : 11] And every time you passed a judgment on somebody else, they shouldn't have done that. She shouldn't have said that. And so on.

This wee recorder records all your judgments. And you eventually stand before God. God says, well, never mind my law. Let's see how you lived up to your own standards.

When you judge just another, says Paul, you judge yourself. And so he deals with the bad man. He deals with the good man.

And chapter 2, verses 17 through into chapter 3, he deals with the religious person. And he's establishing it. Whether you're a bad person, or a good person, or a religious person, you are all equally guilty before a holy God.

And so he comes to a conclusion in chapter 3 at verse 20, therefore no one, whether they're the bad person, the good person, or the religious person, therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law.

[8 : 19] Rather, through the law, we become conscious of sin. And he repeats that in verse 23, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

But having established the problem, and I've only given you the barest outline sketch of that over these opening chapters, Paul then turns to the good news with the gospel, But now, verse 21, But now, a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe there is no difference. So Paul, having established our plight, separated from God, unable to do anything about this by ourselves, guilty and condemned before a holy God, Paul now introduces the gospel.

And he throws virtually the whole spectrum of theological terms at us. But just before we come to them, I could draw your attention to verse 26, which is actually quite an important verse, where it says, 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.

God is just, and the cross upholds both His justice and His love. Here we see both God's holiness and His mercy.

[10 : 08] He is both the just, judge, condemning sin, but also, in Christ, the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Well, turning to what I want to focus on, which are the pictures of salvation that Paul sets before us. And he uses a series of terms to outline what Jesus has done for us.

Redemption, reconciliation, atonement, or propitiation, and justification. And behind each of these terms lies a picture which helps us to understand what God has done for us on the cross.

And let me take, first of all, reconciliation. And reconciliation, if you like, is a picture from the home. And just for a moment we go ahead into chapter 5 where Paul talks about reconciliation.

In chapter 5 at verse 10 he says, If when we were God's enemies we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more having been reconciled shall we be saved through His life.

[11 : 27] Not only is this so but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have now received reconciliation. So, the picture in a sense relates to the home, it relates to marriage, the home, and restored relationships.

Through the cross two parties who were estranged are reunited. Just as a husband and wife might be estranged and need to be reconciled to one another, man and God are estranged from one another and need reconciled to one another.

So, reconciliation is something that is needed when two parties fall out. And the term is familiar to us. We can think of ACAS seeking to reconcile union and management or the marriage guidance counsellor seeking to reconcile a husband and wife.

In these situations it's probably fair to say that there are problems on both sides. No one's ever absolutely perfect but with us and God it's a bit different.

He is 100% in the right and it is we who are in the wrong. We are the ones who have fractured the relationship. But the wonderful thing is that even when we walked out in God he continued to love us.

[13 : 02] Even in the midst of our sin God loves us. Romans 5 and 8 God demonstrates his love for us in this. While we were still sinners Christ died for us.

In 2nd Corinthians 5 at verse 17 Paul says if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation the old is gone the new has come.

All this from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ.

So here is the picture of reconciliation of two parties that are estranged being reunited and we can think here of Christ as our mediator who brings us and God the Father back together.

And behind the picture lies the reality of God's constant love toward us. Left to ourselves we would be complacent but God comes to us takes the initiative invites us into his family to be reconciled to him to be restored in our relationship with him.

[14 : 29] So that's the first picture which you could think of as the picture from the home of the two parties estranged reunited. And then secondly redemption and we're now in chapter 3 verse 23 all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

fascinating a number of hymns that talk about redemption well perfect redemption the purchase of blood to every believer the promise of God.

Well redemption is a picture if you like from the marketplace the word itself means simply deliverance from some evil at great cost and it was a word borrowed mainly from the slave market of the Roman Empire slavery of course was a bondage but it was possible to be bought out of that slavery to be set free so an associated word would be ransom the price paid for the slave to become free and behind this idea of redemption then a price that has to be paid to make someone free and in the case of our relationship with God because we are separated from God the price that had to be paid for us to be brought back to God was the blood of Christ so the idea here is that we are in bondage to sin and are only freed through the price paid in the suffering and death of Christ 1 Peter 1 and 18 says this for you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers but with the precious blood of

Christ a lamb without blemish or defect Paul says you are not your own you were bought at a price redemption a price that has to be paid that we might deliver from sin into the family of God what's the purpose of the cross well to tell us that God loves us but then beyond that the cross is actually there to do something it's there to redeem us it's there to pay the price of our sin to set us free spiritually before God and if we think of Christ as the mediator in terms of reconciliation here of course we think of Christ as the redeemer and I suppose the real issue in all of this is to have each of you in faith made this redeemer yours so a picture from the home reconciliation a picture from the

Roman marketplace redemption and the picture with the Jewish background picture from the temple that of atonement or propitiation verse 23 again all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement or presented him as a propitiation through faith in his blood in the Old Testament a sacrifice had to be made in order for sin to be covered and this is essentially the picture with which we associate forgiveness of sin sin being erased blotted out forgotten the cross God's divine rubber if you like that erases sin and so through faith in Christ it's just as if we had never sinned here's the picture of the lamb sacrificed on behalf of the people all down through the centuries of the

[19 : 12] Old Testament the people had been bringing their lambs to be sacrificed in the temple and at the beginning of his gospel John says John saw Jesus coming towards him and said look the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world so atonement or propitiation is a picture from the temple the word atonement is an Anglo-Saxon word translating a Hebrew word to cover the idea being that sin is covered by the sacrifice associated with forgiveness and cleansing and again so many of our hymns are here and a key aspect of atonement is the blood that was shed the sacrifice necessitated the shedding of blood Ephesians 2 and 13 but now in

Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ so all have sinned but are justified through the redemption it is in Christ Jesus whom God has set forth to be a propitiation or a sacrifice sharing his blood to turn away the wrath of God so that we might be sinless before him so reconciliation picture from the home redemption the picture from the marketplace atonement and propitiation the picture from the temple and lastly justification which is the picture from the law court and this speaks to us of the righteous purity of Christ's life and his substitution on the cross it speaks of much more than forgiveness

I get mildly annoyed every time folks say justification is just as if I'd never sinned and that is theological rubbish biblical rubbish as well the just as if I'd never sinned is a truth that comes from atonement and the covering of our sin that erases our sin but justification is the heart of Paul's argument in Romans it's not just that if you like the slate is white clean and sin forgiven we are given something in exchange namely the righteousness of Christ Paul speaks not of a negative sin forgiven but more so of a righteousness conferred notice the whole context having set out the problem in the opening chapters Romans 3 21 but now he doesn't say but now you can be forgiven the slate white clean so you can start again as it were but now our righteousness from God has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify and this righteousness from God comes through faith in

Jesus Christ to all who believe there is no difference all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace so justification is not simply about forgiveness but about righteousness and if in reconciliation we see Christ as our mediator and in redemption we see him as our redeemer paying the price for us to be set free from sin and in atonement propitiation we see him as the lamb of God giving his life as a sacrifice for our salvation here we see Christ as our advocate justification is the picture of the law court it's a simple act of God the righteous judge declaring us righteous because Christ has satisfied the demands of the law and the cross justification is a statement by God about us picture the scene of your life the eternal courtroom of almighty

God he sits on the throne in all his splendor and glory and there in the dock you prosecution Satan Satan presents his case an easy case to make he's no difficulty in laying hold of evidence that condemns you before God after all it's only one sin to make you guilty but the defence will also speak the advocate arises and the defence is unusual in the least the defence does not seek to establish your innocence your advocate says in effect yes he's guilty but I have paid the price of that guilt I've suffered and died on the cross to pay the price of sin I have on the cross satisfied the demands of the law and in exchange I have clothed him in my righteousness and so God pronounces sentence acquitted and the only question again is Christ your advocate 1 John 2 and 1 we read my dear children

[25 : 09] I write this to you so that you will not sin but if anybody does sin we have one who speaks to the father in our defence Jesus Christ the righteous one we indeed stand before God guilty and condemned but Jesus pays the penalty of our offence and we are therefore judicially acquitted not a question we've been put in parole but we are pardoned justification is a legal transaction Jesus takes our sin to himself and bears its penalty but in exchange gives us his righteousness Romans 3 21 but now our righteousness from God has been made known and this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe so justification is essentially the act of God in declaring the unrighteous righteous which is why just as if I never sin is inadequate here because that only wipes the slate clean

Paul is concerned not just with the negative the forgiveness of sin but the positive the conferment of God's righteousness I like the lovely communion poem from him that Horatio Bonner wrote I think it's the second verse where he says mine is the sin but thine the righteousness mine is the guilt but thine the cleansing blood here is my robe my refuge and my peace thy blood thy righteousness oh Lord my God so we must always be careful not to reduce justification to a mere negative forgiveness but rather see the gift of Christ's righteousness and hear in the wonder of the gospel it's not just that our sins are forgiven erased blotted out that's all negative the wonder of the gospel is that in Jesus sinners are declared saints rebels are declared to be children of their heavenly father and so

Paul flings all these terms at us as it were reconciliation Christ our mediator restoring our relationship with our heavenly father redemption Christ our redeemer paying the ransom to deliver us from the bondage of sin atonement and propitiation where Christ is our sacrifice the lamb being sacrificed giving his blood on the cross for our salvation and justification where Christ is our advocate not only that but conferring upon us his righteousness and so as we reflect on all that God has done for us in Christ these pictures perhaps help us to see something of the roundness of salvation we are reconciled to our father in our restored relationship we are redeemed the price has been paid to set us free we have the picture of atonement where we think of

Jesus the lamb of God who laid down his life for us on the cross and justification where we see that not only are we forgiven but we have been clothed with the righteousness of Christ himself and so as we reflect on these things let us rejoice in all that God has done for us let us reflect on the mystery and the wonder of our salvation and let us praise him as our saviour as our mediator our redeemer our advocate our righteousness let us pray father father God we thank you for all that you have done for us in Christ and we can never fully understand all that was transacted on that cross as your eternal son laid down his life for our salvation but as we reflected in these different pictures behind the cross help us to have a deeper and better understanding of all that you have done for us to see ourselves not only as forgiven but clothed in that righteousness of Christ in whose name we pray

Amen