

We Believe in the Gospel (Romans 3:9-20)

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[0 : 00] But I am very thankful to be here today. Beginning of this week and throughout the week, it was looking like there might be a wintry mix coming in. And usually I love snow. Usually I want it to snow as much as it possibly can. But today I really didn't want it to because one, I wanted to come together.

I wanted to be able to be here worshiping with you. And then two, there's a group of about 10 of us who are leaving at 1205. I mean, we'll say amen, get in the car, and we're heading to the airport to go to Africa on a mission trip to go to Kenya.

And so I want to encourage you to be praying for us on that trip. We're going to have the opportunity while we're in Kenya to work with about 240 pastors. 140 in one location, about 100 in another location, doing some pastoral training, working with a widow's ministry, working with some of the schools, getting in there, having lessons and studies with the students.

And so please be in prayer for us as we travel, as we make our way to Kenya. But as I was thinking about that, there's many things that we've talked about over the last few weeks.

Core commitments that we have as a church, things that we believe in. We believe in the authority of God's word. We believe in the power of prayer. We believe in the importance of community.

[1 : 18] And what we're talking about this week is really ultimately the reason that we're going. It's ultimately the reason that we share faith. It's ultimately the reason that we gather today.

And so it's vitally important to everything that we affirm as believers. Today, we're going to be talking about the fact that we believe in the gospel.

Not only do we believe in the gospel, this is what we build our lives around. There are so many places that we could turn in scripture to think about the fact that we believe in the gospel.

We affirm the gospel. We build our lives around the gospel. And many came to mind as I was thinking about preparing this message today. And in fact, one of the things that I thought about doing was going from a few different passages and just showing how the gospel is something that we see all throughout scripture.

But ultimately, I decided to land on a passage in Romans chapter 3. And that's where we're going to spend our time this morning. In this passage, I want us to first see the need that we have.

[2 : 26] I want us to first see this need we have. The passage, as clear as anywhere, reminds us that we all have a desperate need. This passage, as clear as anywhere you'll find in scripture, reminds us that we all have a desperate need.

I want you to follow along as I read Romans chapter 3, starting in verse 9. And we're going to make our way through verse 20 right now. It says this. What then? Are Jews any better off?

No, not at all. For we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are under sin. As it is written, none is righteous.

No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. No one does good. Not even one.

Their throat is an open grave. And they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood.

[3 : 32] In their paths are ruin and misery. And the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law.

So that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

See at the beginning of chapter 3 here, Paul answers the question, is there an advantage to being a Jew? And if you go back to verse 1, you will see that the answer is yes.

They have had the word of God in the Old Testament and it has prepared the way to help them recognize Jesus when he comes. And so there is some benefit that the Jews have.

But are they without accountability before God? Absolutely not. Paul adds, for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin.

[4 : 38] And so as it turns out, those advantages are actually not that advantageous. Because it reminds us here in this passage that every single one of us is with sin.

When it comes to judgment, they are in the same position as everyone else. We are all under sin. And you would think that would be enough to settle the issue, right? That Paul says that we are all under sin.

But Paul doesn't want there to be any confusion whatsoever with this understanding. He wants us to make very clear. He wants to make the point very clearly that none of us are righteous.

He goes on to say, he says, none is righteous. And then if this isn't clear enough, he says, no, not one. None are righteous.

And then he goes on and on, quoting a number of Old Testament passages with a heavy emphasis on quoting some of the Psalms here. And the thrust of this passage is the universal nature of sin.

[5 : 38] No one is righteous. No one is good. He doesn't want the misconception, there to be a misconception that people often say that mankind is generally good, but there's just a few bad apples.

He doesn't want us to leave room for us to affirm when some people say that that mankind is generally good. Most people are good. No, he's helping us to realize very clearly that no one is good.

None are righteous. No, we are all sinners and we are all dead in our trespasses and sin. And this is a really difficult thing for people to hear because it makes us feel out of control.

It makes it feel like we're not in control of the situation. I don't know if you've ever noticed, but a lot of times, even if you give somebody bad news, they can deal with it okay if they feel like they're in control.

If they feel like they have a way out of it, then like, okay, this is bad news, but I can get through this. I can make a way out. I can figure this out on my own. And this passage lets us know that we can't do that.

[6 : 46] And so this is a really difficult thing because it makes it feel like we are out of control. Have you ever heard people use the expression, people do desperate things in desperate times or desperate times call for desperate measures?

I'm sure we've all heard those things. And I want to share a story with you that really helps highlight this out-of-control feeling that we may have sometimes.

I'm going to go ahead and tell you that there's parts of this that are a little hard to hear, a little difficult to hear, but this actually happened to someone that Catherine and I are both very close to. And it happened about 30 years ago. Has anybody in here ever had braces before? Okay, many of you have had braces. And you probably know, like with braces, they get caught on things sometimes, right?

Always. Maybe a shirt that you're putting on or taking off. Maybe a pillow. Any number of things. There are many things that braces can oftentimes get caught on.

[7 : 46] But this person that Catherine and I are really close to, her braces got caught on something a little different. In fact, she was swimming in a pool. And you know, the pools have those rubber liners that are on the bottom of it and seal around the pool.

And she was swimming and actually went down to the bottom and hit her mouth on the bottom of the pool. And her front brace got caught on the rubber liner on the bottom of the pool.

And all of a sudden, there's really not many options left. You have to force yourself up and come up. And it actually pulled out her front tooth and all of those things. And this story is one of those stories that's really difficult to hear sometimes and really difficult to imagine because that is some kind of panic that you would be in if your mouth is caught on the bottom of a pool.

And so there's not a lot of options. And so this story is hard to hear because one, somebody's tooth gets pulled out. And two, there's this real danger that's associated with it of drowning.

Yet, and I think one of the most difficult parts of this story is because it feels so out of control. It feels like this situation is out of control.

[8 : 59] And so we don't like it when we feel out of control in a situation. Many of us, most of us, I would imagine, like to be in control of a situation.

When it's out of control, our anxiety rises. Everything around it just feels wrong. And I would even venture to say again that most of us are fine with bad news as long as we feel like we can fix it. As long as we feel like we can fix a situation, then we're okay with it. But what Paul is trying to say here as clearly as he can, without leaving any room for misunderstanding, he's saying that every single person is a sinner.

And there's no amount of good works that can make up for that sin. In fact, he would even say that even if you could live a life, even if you could live a perfect life from this day forward, it wouldn't be enough.

Even if from this day forward you could live a perfect life, it wouldn't be enough because present obedience doesn't make up for past disobedience because present obedience is what is required anyway.

[10 : 09] And so it's not like it's something that you can build up. It's not something that you can bank up. It's not something that you, if you live a good enough life, do enough good things, give to the church enough, attend enough, do any number of things.

You can't build up a bank to make up for those past things. And at this point you may be thinking, Brad, I thought we were talking about the gospel today. You know, the good news.

This is all just seems like really bad news that you're talking about right now. And you're exactly right. But we need to see our helplessness as much as possible to help us see our need for Jesus. We need to see our helplessness as much as we possibly can to really grasp who Jesus is and what he accomplishes for us.

Jerry Bridges, in a book I was reading one time, was going into great depth about the weight of our sin and the whole title of the book was the gospel for real life. But he was going on and on about the weight of sin.

[11 : 12] And he said this, he says, my reason is to cause us all to realize we have no place to hide. In our relationship with God, we cannot plead our Christian duties as helpful as they may be or our external morality as exemplary as it may be.

Instead, he says, we must confess with Ezra that our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached the heavens. Bottom line is that we are all sinners.

And because of that, apart from Jesus, we are on a path that leads us to an eternity apart from Jesus in hell. And that reality must sink in to understand the gospel.

It not only helps us see our need for Jesus, it also reminds us of the need that we have and the call that God has given us as believers to take this message all across the world to people who've never heard the name of Jesus.

This need should revive in us a deep appreciation for the gospel, a deep adoration for God for what he did for us. But it should also spur us on to take this message to people who've never heard the name of Jesus.

[12 : 31] Because if they never hear the name of Jesus, then they're going to spend an eternity in hell. And so this truth of the gospel, that we are all sinners, there's nothing that we can do about it on our own, must be a truth that sinks in deep.

It must be something that we understand very clearly. Because we must understand that clearly to understand the gospel clearly. At this point, many people often try to make the argument, well, why doesn't God just forgive?

If sin is really this bad, why doesn't God just make a blanket statement and just forgive everybody? And why go through with all of this? Why even send Jesus to the cross?

Why do this? If God is all loving, then why doesn't He just forgive? Why doesn't He forgive without sacrifice? And the answer is, there is no other way.

Sometimes people like to come up with fictional scenarios to find a loophole in what Christians believe about God. For example, sometimes people will say, well, can God create a boulder so big that He can't lift it?

[13 : 49] And so this is a trick question, right? They try to, well, if you say yes, then you're limiting God's power to be able to lift it. And if you say no, then you're saying that, well, God can't do

something.

And so the truth of the matter is, in a situation like that, that God can create an infinitely large boulder. And guess what? God can lift an infinitely large boulder.

But yet many times people try to find these loopholes in that. And others will say, if God is so loving, why doesn't He just forgive people?

Why put Jesus through the cross if He is so loving? The cross not only speaks about our sin, but it also speaks about God's holiness.

You see, not only does it speak about God's love, but it also speaks about God's justice. Because He is perfect in His justice, He can't ignore sin.

[14:48] It can't be something that can go without a price being paid. You see, God does not exalt His love and His mercy at the expense of His justice.

He's not going to exalt one of His attributes at the expense of another attribute. And that's why the cross is so beautiful. Because we get to see clearly God's love, His grace, His mercy, His justice, His wrath, all coming together at the cross.

You see, there was no other way. A price had to be paid. And I think we all understand this in a sense. I think in a way we all understand this. For example, if you think about the great theological masterpiece, National Treasure, you know, the one with Nicolas Cage, if you think about that movie, we can all understand this pretty clearly, I think.

In the movie, if you haven't seen it, Nicolas Cage, he ends up stealing the Declaration of Independence, going on the run from the FBI, and they're going all over until he finally finds this national treasure.

And he's, at the end of the movie, he's sitting there with the FBI agent who's been chasing him all over the place. And they're sitting there together. And the FBI agent asks him, he says, well, what do you hope to get out of this situation?

[16:12] What do you hope to get out of this? And he responds, he goes, I'd really like to not go to jail. He said, I'd really like to not go to prison. And if you remember what that FBI agent says right after the end of this, he goes, well, somebody has to go to jail.

He says, somebody, you can't do something like steal the Declaration of Independence, go on the run through multiple states, and have the whole FBI looking for you without a consequence happening.

You can't do that. It can't be ignored. Stealing the Declaration of Independence is a big deal. It can't just be ignored. And you see, sin is a big deal.

A lot of times we try to gloss over it and downplay it, but it's not something that can be swept under the rug. C.S. Lewis once said, he said, fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement.

He is a rebel who must lay down his arms. The problem is people don't see themselves as sinners anymore. We don't see ourselves as sinners anymore.

[17:18] There's a book written in 1973 that was already seeing this trend, and it said, whatever became, the title of the book was, whatever became of sin. And in this book, Carl Menger wrote, he says, the very word sin, which seems to have disappeared, was once a proud word.

It was once a strong word, an ominous and serious word, but the word went away. It has almost disappeared. The word along with the notion. Why?

Doesn't anyone sin anymore? Doesn't anyone believe in sin anymore? And if this is something that was evident 53 years ago, then surely it's something that is still prevalent today.

It's still something that people struggle with today. In fact, D.A. Carson, he commented that the most frustrating aspect of doing evangelism in universities is the fact that students generally have no idea of sin.

He said they know how to sin well enough, but they have no idea what constitutes sin. And so without knowledge of sin, we don't see the need for a savior.

[18:31] Without the knowledge of sin, we don't see the need for a savior. A low view of sin will inevitably lead to a low view of grace. If you don't see sin, if you don't see the need that you have, then you don't see a need for a savior.

If you don't see the need for sin, then you don't see the need for Jesus. We need to clearly see our sin. As difficult and disheartening as that may be, we need to see our sin.

And so if this is where the story ends, and this is pretty depressing, to be quite honest. If this is where this passage stops, then we could all walk out of here with our heads low and just feeling really terrible about ourselves.

However, this is not where the story ends. I love it when Paul does this, and he does this in several places. He'll paint a really grim picture for us. And then he says, but.

He'll paint a really grim picture for us. And he says, but. There is hope. There's hope for us. And so we see very clearly in this next section, the good news of the gospel on display.

[19 : 43] This next section, we see very clearly the good news of the gospel on display. We see this gospel on display in many ways throughout this next section.

And I want to bring our attention to a few of those pictures that we see. To begin with, we see the beautiful truth that God intervenes.

We see the beautiful truth that God intervenes in this situation. Verse 21 and 22 says, but now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law.

Although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. Sin and its consequences are terrible.

But now. Sin, every single one of us is a sinner and we have no hope on our own. But now. Tim Keller says it like this.

[20 : 43] He says, but is a word that reverses the statement which has gone before it. It can qualify praise or it can bring hope where there seem to be none.

He says, this is why there are few words more glorious than the but that begins Romans 3.21. For by works of the law, no human being will be justified.

Through the law comes knowledge of sin. But. But now. Paul now turns from the black cloth of human sin to hold up the glittering diamond of the gospel.

He says, this is a beautiful statement. This desperate situation that we all find ourselves in that we can't do anything about. But now.

But now God intervenes on our behalf. In a place where there was no hope. The only one who could offer hope shows up in a big way.

[21 : 39] God intervenes on our behalf. But what we also see in this passage is that God justifies. God intervenes. But we also see God justifies.

Since for there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And are justified by his grace as a gift.

We are told in this verse how we are made right. God justifies us. Justification is an instantaneous legal act in which God declares our sins to be forgiven.

Because of Jesus. And Christ's righteousness has been placed on to us. This is the great exchange. This is where we give Christ our sin.

Our shame. Our regret. All of those things that we've done to destroy our relationship with God. We give those things to Christ. He takes them. Nails it to the cross.

[22 : 40] And gives us his righteousness in return. And so that when God looks at us. He doesn't see our sin. He doesn't see those things that we regret. He doesn't see those things that we're ashamed of.

He looks at us and sees his holy and perfect son. Because he's been given to us in our place. He's taken that sin and given us his righteousness.

It doesn't mean that all of our actions are righteous. But it means that he's declared us to be righteous. Because of what Christ accomplished on the cross. Tony Morita says it like this.

He says if you put your faith in Jesus. God declares that you are forgiven. Acquitted and put into a right relationship with God. Based on what Christ has done for us.

Through his sinless life. And his death and resurrection. Justified people have a new status. A new identity. A new family.

[23 : 40] A new hope of enjoying a new creation. Justified people are made new. We have a hope that nobody else does.

Because of what Christ did for us. Here's the good news. In Jesus. God gives us the righteousness that we do not have. And cannot earn.

In Christ. God gives us the righteousness that we do not have. And cannot earn. The saving righteousness is received by faith.

It's not something you can earn. Once you have it. It's not something that you can lose. And so the question that we must answer today is this. What is your faith in? The question that we must all answer today is.

What is your faith in? Is it in the finished work of Jesus? Is it in what he accomplished on the cross? Or is your faith in doing enough good?

[24 : 40] To try to outweigh the bad? Is your faith in giving enough? Attending enough? Praying enough? Being baptized enough? What is your faith in?

Because if it's in our works. And the things that we can do. Then it's filthy rags. Only one of these things. Can provide hope.

Can provide eternal security. Only one of these things can save. And that's if our faith. Is in Christ. The next picture of the gospel we see in this passage.

Is the fact that God redeems. God redeems. We see that God intervenes. God justifies. And now we see that God redeems.

Let us pick up where we left off in verse 24. It says, Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood.

[25 : 36] To be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness. Because in his divine forbearance. He had passed over former sins.

What does this word redemption mean? When you think of redemption. When you think of being redeemed. What comes to mind? Redemption carries with it the thought of salvation.

It carries with it the idea of being saved from something. Being redeemed from something. It carries with it the idea of restoration. Where there was a broken relationship.

And now it has been restored. It has been redeemed. Something was broken. And needed to be thrown away. But now it has been redeemed. Now it has been saved. Now it has been given new life.

And so what we see here is God is redeeming us. But I also want to bring our attention to a really important word in this passage. And it is not a word that a lot of times we use.

[26 : 35] But it helps us to understand how God redeems us. And he redeems us by Christ becoming our propitiation. He is our propitiation.

Now some of your translations it may read he is our expiation or he is our atoning sacrifice. And these are tremendously helpful in our understanding of what Paul is saying. However, the reason that many translations keep the word propitiation here is because of all that it conveys.

Because it carries with it so much more than we can even comprehend in one word in our English language. Like expiation, propitiation in part does mean that our sins are covered.

They are removed. However, propitiation carries with it, this is done by Jesus taking on God's wrath for us. By paying for the removal with his blood.

You see, propitiation is a payment that satisfies. It's a payment that Christ is making that satisfies the wrath of God. And this is what is given to us.

[27 : 42] This is how we are saved. Listen to how Paul says it elsewhere. In 2 Corinthians 5, 21 it says, For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that we might become the righteousness of God.

He made him to be sin who knew no sin. And so in this we are getting this idea of Christ taking this on himself. He made him to be sin who knew no sin.

The only one who never knew sin was Jesus Christ. And God made him to be sin for us. He took that on himself for us.

Galatians 3, 13 says, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

And so what we see here is this picture of propitiation. This payment that satisfies. There was no other way to pay for this except Christ.

[28 : 45] And the gospel is the most life-giving news we could ever imagine. Because of all of this. The fact that God intervenes when we had no hope.

God justifies. He declares us righteous. He redeems us. He saves us. This means the gospel is the most life-giving news that has ever been delivered.

And so if you're here today. And you've spent your life trying to be good enough. Do enough good to outweigh your bad. Then I plead with you to recognize that you can never accomplish this on your own.

Your sin is too great for you to do anything about it. But here is the wonderful news. God knows that. God's always known that.

And from the moment that sin entered into the world. He had a plan to offer salvation to you today. God knows this isn't something that you can pay for on your own.

[29 : 46] God knows that apart from Him working, you have no hope. This isn't a surprise to Him. That's why from the moment that sin entered into the world. God set in motion a plan that was going to redeem the world.

That was going to offer salvation to each of us. And so if this is something that you've never done. If this is something you need to know more about today.

Then I encourage you please come forward after the service. Yes, it may be a little awkward for you to step out and come down. But my goodness, look at what we are offered in Christ.

We're offered hope. We're offered salvation. We're offered this in Christ that couldn't be offered any other way. I would love nothing more than to pray with you and point you to Jesus as your Savior. Or maybe it's not coming down here to me today. Maybe it's going to the person who invited you. Maybe it's going to a parent. Maybe it's going to a Sunday school teacher. But whatever the case may be.

[30 : 49] If this is something that you need to know more about. Then please don't put that off. Don't put it off. But the gospel is good news for believers as well.

You know a lot of times we think about a gospel message. As being for those who aren't a part of the faith family. Aren't Christians. But the gospel is good news for believers as well.

As believers we must continually keep in mind. That Christ has satisfied the justice of God on our behalf. Never again should we have to fear the retributive justice of God.

Yet all too often we find ourselves living in fear of God's justice. We find ourselves living in this fear. I did it again God.

I've been trying to stop this sin over and over and over again. Yeah here am I doing it again and again and again. And if we're not careful we can start telling ourselves.

[31 : 50] Well surely God is just fed up with me. Surely God is just done with me because I can't stop doing this. Surely God is tired of forgiving me.

And maybe this last time maybe that was his last. That was the straw that broke the camel's back. He's never going to forgive me again. We've got to guard ourselves from going down that road. Because that's not what we see in scripture. As such at times we fail to grasp by faith the fact that Christ Jesus has fully satisfied God's justice for us.

Jerry Bridges again was really helpful in thinking about this. He says one morning in my private devotions. He said I was reflecting on my sin. Which for some reason seemed particularly painful to me that day.

How many of us have been there? Where we're frustrated with ourselves. We're frustrated that we find ourselves going down this path over and over again.

[32 : 51] We find ourselves frustrated by the fact that this happened again. Jerry Bridges says in my discouragement I blurted out.

God you would be perfectly just in sending me to hell. And he said immediately on the hill of those words though came the thought. No.

You wouldn't. Because Jesus satisfied your justice for me. Because Jesus satisfied your justice for me.

And so in those moments. Where our sin is crushing. Where it's overwhelming. Where we're frustrated with it. May we never say God you would be perfectly just in sending me to hell.

Because no he wouldn't. Because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. When we place our faith and our trust in him. Those sins past, present and future are paid for.

[33 : 50] It's finished. It's accomplished. It's done. There's nothing we can do to add to it. And there's nothing we can do to take away from it. Because it was perfect and complete.

Church, the gospel is good news for all of us today. Jesus is enough. He's enough to save you. And he is enough to sustain you. Father, thank you so very much. For your word. For what it teaches us about you. Thank you for the gospel, Lord.

Thank you for the good news. Thank you for making it very clear to us. That each and every person. Each and every one of us. Is a sinner. And we have a desperate need.

A need that we can't do anything about on our own. But God, thank you for knowing that. Thank you for making a way.

[34 : 47] Where your justice. Where your wrath. Where your love. Where your mercy. Where your grace. All come together. To offer us salvation. Lord, thank you for intervening.

When we had no hope. Thank you for justifying us. Thank you for redeeming us. And Lord, I pray that if there's somebody here today. That's never placed their faith and their trust in you.

Lord, that today would be the day. That they give their life to you. Where they go from death to life. But Lord, I also pray.

That this gospel. Would be good news. For all who believe as well. That it would daily be good news. Or would daily be reminded.

That you are enough. You're enough to save us. And you're enough to sustain us. And so Lord, help us to live lives. In light of that. Each and every day.

[35 : 47] And we ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to invite you to stand. We're going to sing a song of invitation this morning. If God is speaking to you. Won't you respond as we stand together.

And sing. Thank you.