

(5) Why everyone needs Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm 14 on page 543. The fool says in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt. They do a dangle of deeds.

There is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.

They have all turned aside. Together they have become corrupt. There is none who does good, not even one. Have they no knowledge of the evildoers, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and do not call upon the Lord?

There they are of great terror, for God is with the generation of the righteous. You would shame the sons of the poor, but the Lord is his refuge. Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion when the Lord restores the fortunes of his people.

Let Jacob rejoice. Let Israel be glad. Our second reading is from Romans chapter 3, starting at verse 9, and that's on page 1133.

[1 : 1 3] So Romans chapter 3, verse 9. What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, 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. 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. 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.

[2 : 2 6] For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. Amen. Thanks very much indeed, Matt, for reading.

We keep Romans open at Romans chapter 3 as we continue our series in Romans these Sunday mornings. Why don't I pray and ask for God's help for us as we look at his word together.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we've been thinking this morning about the fact that you are indeed a holy God. Lord, we praise you that you are the one true living God who speaks to us.

And therefore we pray this morning, please would we tremble at your word. We pray we would receive these words from Romans as they are, the very words of God. Please would you take them and apply them to our hearts and minds that you would humble us and do good for us.

And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, the issue for us today is human nature and what people are by nature like. And I think you can see that is the issue if you look at verse 10.

[3 : 39] None is righteous, no, not one. Verse 11, no one seeks God. And verse 12, no one does good, not even one.

By contrast, of course, our culture assumes, doesn't it, that people are good. Yes, there are one or two exceptions who hit the front page of the papers or who stand for war crimes. But on the whole, our culture assumes that people are good.

And that is a very deep-seated assumption, isn't it? So we were driving through Sydenham a couple of days ago and we noticed a preschool nursery with the name Little Cherubs.

What is the assumption? People are good. Little people are little cherubs. It's an assumption, too, that it affects our politics.

Politicians assume that people are good, that depending on their political convictions, they will argue that if only people were better educated or lifted out of poverty or there was greater social mobility or greater choice, then things would be fine and problems would be solved.

[4 : 44] It never occurs to us that there might actually be something wrong with human nature, which is far more deeply seated. But above all, the assumption that people are good affects us spiritually.

You see, why is it that the vast majority of the population of this country assume they'll go to heaven? Why is that? Well, it's because of our assumption that people are good.

Not perfect, of course, but good enough. What you think of human nature has enormous implications. And today, as we look at Romans chapter 3, verses 9 to 20, we see what God tells us about human nature, and it is that no one is good.

But please don't respond by saying, well, there you go again, the church just making people feel guilty. Because the reason God tells us this is out of love. Just as we said a few weeks ago, if you go to your GP and they have some bad news for you, and they tell you the bad news, they tell you out of love.

So you know what treatment is needed and what course of action there needs to be. And it's just the same with God. He wants us to see what we are by nature like so that we'll see reality.

[6 : 10] So that we'll stop thinking that we are good enough to get to heaven by our own efforts, whatever efforts that might be. So we'll put our trust in Christ instead and be confident of being right with God.

Well, there's an outline on the back of the service sheet which shows you where we are going for these next few minutes together. First of all, the charge that cannot be avoided. The charge that cannot be avoided.

Have a look with you at Romans chapter 3, verse 9. What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all.

For we've already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin. And the point here is very simple. It's very straightforward.

It is that all of us are in the dock before God. Paul is talking about the first century Jew. We saw last week the enormous privileges they enjoyed in the Old Testament.

[7 : 18] But they were no better off. Their privileges were not a kind of get-out-of-jail-free cards when it comes to the judgment day when the secrets will be exposed.

Why? Well, because, verse 9, we have already charged that all are under sin. Everyone is under the power of sin.

Everyone is enslaved to sin. Now, sin is a word, isn't it, which our culture hardly takes seriously. We either use it to describe really awful things, which other people do, or we use it to describe sort of trivial things, which everyone does, like eating chocolate or something like that.

But no, what did we see back in chapter 1, verse 21? For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Sin is a rejection of God. We know that God is God, but we will not have him to be God over us. And we not only reject God, we then bring in other things and put other things in his place.

[8 : 37] And we live for those things and we honour those things instead of honouring God. There was an article in the Independent newspaper some time ago about how as a society we no longer say that things are wrong and that we use the word inappropriate instead.

And the article read like this, a school in Worthing has banned the drink Red Bull because, in the words of the school, we found that a small number of children's behaviour was less appropriate after drinking it.

Less appropriate, asked the journalist. What you mean is it was much worse. And the article finished, could we please stop saying inappropriate when what we actually mean is wrong?

Well, it's inevitable, isn't it, that a society that shies away from saying that something is wrong will also shy away from talking about sin. Least of all in describing ourselves.

So, did you notice how these verses speak about everyone? You see, just look down at the verses again. Verse 10, none, no, not one. Verse 11, no one.

[9 : 54] Verse 12, all, no one, not even one. Verse 19, every mouth. Verse 20, no human being.

No one, by nature, right with God. Now, we find it very difficult to get our heads around this, don't we? Because we imagine in our minds that as God looks at the world, he imagines the world as a kind of, you know, a sort of moral skyscraper.

And at the top, you have the really, really good people. At the bottom, you have the really bad people. And at some stage, there is the kind of cut-off mark. And however we imagine that skyscraper to be, wherever we put ourselves, and of course, we're humble enough not to put ourselves in the very kind of good people category, but we also don't put ourselves in the very bad people category.

Wherever we put ourselves, it is just above, isn't it? The cut-off line. Isn't that how we think? Below the cut-off line, the murderers, the pedophiles, the traffic wardens and Colonel Gaddafi, and above the cut-off line, well, we just managed to scrape in ourselves.

I'm not perfect, but I'm just about good enough. That is how we think. That is how our culture thinks. And we need to know that such confidence is entirely misplaced.

[11 : 28] Verse 9, everyone is a slave to sin. Everyone is under the power of sin. Everyone, unable, powerless, to change. Which means, verse 10, no one is righteous, no one is by nature right with God.

Now, may I say that I'm conscious that for some of us here this morning, this is totally new to us, we have never heard it before, and I'm aware it is not an easy thing to hear, is it?

Especially when our culture says to us, you are essentially a good person. It is a hard thing to hear. And if you think, if you're finding yourself thinking, actually, I'm not sure if I can hear this, we'd love you to join that Christianity Explore course, which Mark mentioned.

It starts in two weeks' time on Sunday morning. We'd love you to do it. It's a brilliant course. It goes over the basics of the Christian faith, and it's a great opportunity to ask your questions as well and to think further.

The change that cannot be avoided. But secondly, the evidence that cannot be denied, because in verses 10 to 18, Paul unpacks that phrase at the beginning of verse 10, no one is righteous.

[12 : 40] And here, if you like, is the evidence being read out in the court of law. And what Paul has done, really, in verses 10 to 18, is he's simply done a kind of Google search of the Old Testament to see what God thinks that men and women are by nature like.

And so, verses 10 to 12, they have rotten hearts. No one understands God. No one seeks God. All have turned aside. All have become worthless.

That is a quote from Psalm 14, which we had read earlier. Now, these verses aren't, of course, saying that no one does good things. Rather, they are talking about the direction of our lives.

And it is not good. No one is right with God. Everyone has turned away from him. No one, by nature, seeks God. You see, sin is not first and foremost about the way I treat other people.

It is first and foremost about the way I've treated God. God. Now, yes, we'll see in verse 13 onwards there are implications for the way I treat other people, but first and foremost it is about the way I treat God.

[13 : 55] And it may well be that some of us here this morning perhaps are particularly conscious of this at the moment that we don't see God. Perhaps in the past we did see God with great enthusiasm.

But perhaps as we have or perhaps it's begun to dawn on us that actually there are going to be huge implications once we grasp the truth about God.

And we don't really like it. And we can just sense ourselves backing away from what we know is the truth. No one by nature seeks God.

Back in January, on January the 12th after the gun attack in Tucson, Arizona, Barack Obama gave what was regarded to be what was regarded as one of the best speeches of his career.

And during the speech he said this, I believe that for all our imperfections we are full of decency and goodness.

[14 : 57] Really? Is that really what human nature is like? No one is righteous. No, not one. No one understands.

No one seeks God. All have turned aside. And then verses 13 to 14 we move from rotten hearts to bitter words.

Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Here Paul quotes from three more psalms.

And I take it the logic is clear, isn't it? Rotten hearts lead to bitter words. Rotten hearts lead to bitter words. Our speech reveals the dimension of human sin perhaps more than anything else.

So what do you notice in those two verses is there's a progression as Paul moves from our throats to our tongues to our lips to our mouths.

[16 : 05] A slow but devastating movement from our thoughts to our words. The point being of course that it's by our words that our thoughts and hearts are revealed.

Deceitful words, poisonous words, bitter words. And finally, verses 15 to 18, from bitter words to hostile deeds. Now I guess most of us learnt pretty quickly that the playground ditty, sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me, simply wasn't true.

And actually words do hurt. And bitter words lead to hostile deeds. And that is just what we see here in verses 15 to 18.

Notice again that the focus is on the direction of life. So verse 15, their feet. Verse 16, their paths. Verse 17, the way. Here is the breakdown of human society as human beings inflict destruction and misery on each other.

Rotten hearts lead to bitter words, lead to hostile deeds. There is the evidence. There was an interview on the radio last year with Katrin Himmler, author of the book *The Himmler Brothers*.

[17 : 27] Her great uncle was Heinrich Himmler, the Nazi war criminal who had been in charge of the SS and the Gestapo. And the interview was absolutely fascinating as she discussed how her well-educated, comfortably off, bourgeois, her gentle, cultured, middle-class great uncle from a perfectly normal, respectable family had become a mass murderer.

What had turned him into a war criminal, she was asked. And she had no answer.

She had spent hours and hours and hours kind of going through the family history to see if there might have been anything in his childhood or background or, you know, whatever to trigger what eventually came of his life and there was nothing.

she had no answers. You see, it totally blows, doesn't it, out of the sky, the idea that liberal, cultured, middle-class people have the moral high ground.

You see, the world just doesn't make sense, does it, if we insist that people are good. It simply makes no sense of the world in which we live.

[18 : 55] the evidence that cannot be nighed, rotten hearts, bitter tongues, hostile deeds. Now, of course, it may well be that some of us look at this list of things and we think, well, hang on a moment, isn't this just a bit over the top?

Isn't it a bit kind of excessive? But Paul's point here is not that everything I say is deceitful, but when I do say deceitful things, it reveals a heart that is deceitful.

Not that my mouth is always full of bitterness, but when it is, it reveals a heart that is full of bitterness.

Not that I'm always vengeful, but when I am, it reveals a heart that is vengeful. That is what the human heart is like. Our hearts express their true nature in different degrees.

With some, it's more hidden than others. But underneath, this is what our hearts are like by nature. And the summing up is there in verse 18.

[19 : 56] There is no fear of God before their eyes. So let me ask you a question. Which is more realistic? The cultural assumption that people are good or God's assumption that no one is good?

Which best fits reality? Which best fits your life? Which best fits the place you live?

The place you work? Your school? Your family? Is Little Cherubs really the best name for a preschool nursery?

Surely Rachel and Liz and others who decided to call the Grace Church Mums and Toddlers group Scallywags actually, that is much more like it, isn't it?

Not that the word Scallywags as such appears in these verses, but I think they got to the heart of it. The evidence that cannot be denied. Thirdly, the verdict that is not in any doubt.

[21 : 01] Verse 19. 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.

Now the first part of verse 19 is addressed to the first century Jewish person with all their religious privileges. After all, Paul's been quoting, hasn't he, from the Old Testament. And the point, of course, is if you look at verse 19, is that if this describes them with their privileges, well how much more does it describe the rest of us?

So that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God. In other words, we are silenced.

And you and I are meant to feel that deeply. All of us rightly face the judgment of God. Whatever excuses we may have thought we'd have had, whether it's that we were fairly decent people, which we looked at two weeks ago, whether it's we thought that we were fairly religious people, which we looked at last week, whether we have kind of questions in our minds about, well, is it really right for God to judge, which again we looked at last week, all of those excuses have been knocked away.

You and I are meant to feel at this point the fact that, yes, we are silenced. We have no excuses that God is right to judge, that he is right to judge us, that he is right to judge you, that he is right to judge me on the final day.

[22 : 45] You see that phrase which you often hear, God hates the sinner but loves the sin. Is that really true? God hates the sinner? Sorry, I got that the wrong way out of my eye.

God hates... That is true. God hates the sin but loves the sinner. That's what I'm trying to say. You often hear that, don't you? God hates the sin but loves the sinner. Is that really true?

No. It's at best it's only a half-truth. It's not that God is angry at my sin. He is, but he's angry at me too. God's wrath, his judgment, is personal.

God does hate sin and he's angry with sinners. I was called to do a jury service a couple of years ago and at the end of the trial we delivered our verdict, a guilty verdict and the judge simply replied, yep, this was a clear-cut case.

There is absolutely no doubt the defendant was guilty. And it's just the same here. As we read verse 19, we're meant to feel a small taste, if you like, of the final verdict on the judgment day that we will have nothing to say in our defense.

[24 : 06] Now isn't that a great kindness of God that he tells us this now? And isn't it a great kindness of God that he tells us verse 20? For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

By works of the law, Paul means human initiative or human effort. In other words, that no one is made right with God by any kind of human effort or any human initiative.

There's nothing we can do to get right with God ourselves. God's law in the Old Testament doesn't give us a kind of leg up. It simply condemns us. The purpose of God's law in the Old Testament is not to put us right with God but to show us we are wrong with God.

You see, isn't it a great kindness that God tells us that? A great kindness that God tells us that he doesn't look at the world like a sort of moral skyscraper with all the good people at the top and all the bad people at the bottom and a cut-off line somewhere in the middle.

No, in God's eyes there are only bad people. The only difference that God sees is between those who have repented and turned to Jesus Christ for forgiveness and those who have not.

[25 : 24] Do you remember chapter 2, verse 4 that we looked at a couple of weeks ago? Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

Now, so, if you're here this morning and you are not yet trusting Jesus Christ, we are delighted you are here, but please understand that God's word to you today is not try harder.

That's what our culture assumes, doesn't it? that the Christian message is try harder to be a better person. No, God's word to you today is to repent.

To repent simply means to change direction from trusting in ourselves and our own efforts to get right with God to trusting in Jesus Christ and his death in our place.

You see, just see how the next paragraph begins, verse 21. But now, they are probably the two most significant words in the whole of this letter.

[26 : 33] But now, look on to verse 24, where we see that all those who trust in Jesus are put right with God as a gift.

Not because of what we do, but verse 25, because Jesus died as a propitiation, which means that Jesus died to turn aside God's wrath so that we need not face the judgment.

God's message is not be good, it is repent. To trust in Jesus and to trust in his death in our place.

Would you imagine a man dying in the hospital and on his bedside table next to him there is a glass in which there is medicine that can save his life?

Now, in order for that man to die, he doesn't have to slit his throat or blow his brains out or to be rude to the doctor or insult the nurse.

[27 : 41] He doesn't even deliberately have to refuse to take this glass of medicine. Now, all that needs to happen is for him to do nothing. Well, in a similar way, God wants all of us to know this morning that we all face the judgments.

Please don't hear this and do nothing about it. If you know you need to take action, please come and talk to me afterwards.

Please talk to a friend here afterwards. Well, those of us who are trusting in Jesus Christ, I want to finish by asking the question, is this message that we've been thinking about this morning, Romans chapter 3 verses 9 to 20, is this part of our gospel?

Is this part of our gospel? You see, just turn on to Romans chapter 15 for a moment. Romans chapter 15.

Let's just remind ourselves of one of the reasons why Paul is writing this letter. Romans chapter 15 verse 24. I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain and to be helped on my journey there by you.

[29 : 02] Paul is wanting to strengthen the church in Rome in their commitments to evangelism so they'll get right behind him as he seeks to take the gospel to Spain.

And God wants to strengthen our commitment to evangelism as well. Everyone faces the judgment, there are no exceptions. Is that something we believe?

Is that something you believe? Is that something you believe? To what extent is your evangelism faithful to what we see here about the reality of sin and the reality of judgments?

After all, if people don't understand the problem of sin and judgments, they'll never, will they, see their need to repent and to put their trust in Jesus.

They'll never understand why it's so wonderful that Jesus died bearing God's judgments. and then have you begun to think how you can explain this lovingly, faithfully and humbly to others?

[30 : 12] Now, I take it if we do believe it, we'll be trying to make the very most that we can of those guest events coming up over the next ten days or so.

well, why don't we have a few moments of quiet, I'll then pray. For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this clear word this morning, that no one is righteous, not even one, that all of us turn away and therefore that none of us, by our own human effort or human initiative, can be right with you.

Heavenly Father, thank you for telling us this in your kindness and your love for us, since it is quite the opposite of what we think by nature.

and we pray that your spirit would continue to convict us of our sin and the reality of judgment, that we might be silenced before you and that we might be those who would cling to the Lord Jesus and delight in his death in our place.

[31 : 41] And we ask it for his name's sake. Amen.