

The Righteousness of God

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[0 : 00] Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the Lord Jesus. We thank you that he did die for us and rose again. Father, we thank you that we can hear of him and what you have done for us through him by reading your word, the Bible.

And so, Father, we pray now that as we read it and think about it and reflect on it, that you would give us minds to understand it. And Father, help me to speak clearly, not for my glory, but for yours. And we pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, if I asked you what the word righteous means, I wonder what you'd say.

I'm not talking about the righteous brothers whose hits were Unchained Melody and You've Lost That. No, I'm not going to sing it. That's as far as I can go.

Love affiliate, you might know that one. Or there's actually the latest Google font. The latest computer font from Google is called Righteous. You probably didn't know that.

[1 : 07] I'm not talking about those kind of things, but what does it mean for a person to be righteous? If someone asks you what does that mean, I wonder what you'd say. In fact, why don't we take a moment to talk to the person next to you, just to kind of get you thinking about it.

Ask the person next to you, what do you think the word righteous means? I think I've got it on the slide. Okay, that's the question. You've got about 40 seconds. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go.

Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go.

Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go.

Go. Go. Go. Go. Now the reason I've got you thinking about the word righteous or being righteous or having righteousness is because in our passage today the word actually comes up seven times in just five verses.

[2 : 29] Seven times in five verses. If you're counting them you need to realise that the words just and justifies it's the same word in the original language.

It's the same as righteous or declared righteous. In other words the big idea of this little passage is all about righteousness. So in verse 21 the righteousness of God.

Verse 22 this righteousness. Or verse 24 he says justified or declared righteous. Verse 25 he says to demonstrate his righteousness.

Verse 26 demonstrate his righteousness again and be someone who declares righteous. Justifies those who have faith in Christ. It's all about being righteous.

Being declared righteous. And so what does being righteous mean? Well it means to be good, upright, innocent. But over the last couple of weeks we've seen that as Glenn reminded us at the start we're not all good, upright and innocent are we?

[3 : 40] No, no, no, we are bad, crooked, guilty. I mean we can still do good things, yes, but at our core we are not good. We are not innocent.

We are bad and guilty. I mean you only have to turn on the news to see that. Or come around to my place around homework time and bedtime and you'll see unrighteousness then.

Actually you better not come around to my place because you might see my unrighteousness as well. But we see it in our passage. So have a look at verse number 23 for example. It says all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

You see we've all sinned, fallen short of God's glory or literally we all lack God's glory. We all lack God's righteous character, his goodness, his uprightness.

In other words, we lack his righteousness because we've all sinned. All people, whether Jew or Gentile, Aussie, Chinese, Sri Lankan, Indian, we have all sinned.

[4 : 39] And so we are all unrighteous. This was Paul's conclusion at the end of last week. So if you've got your Bibles open there, which will be really helpful for you, have a look at chapter 3 verse

9 just on the left hand side of the page there.

Chapter 3 verse 9. Paul concludes by saying, what shall we conclude then? Do Jews have any advantages? Not at all. For we've already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles, that is Jews and non-Jews, everyone alike are all under the power of sin.

As it is written, there is no one, look, 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. Now, why is that a problem? I mean, we all mess up from time to time. What's the big deal?

Well, the big deal is you have to turn back one page to see it. So turn back one page to chapter 1 verse 18. It's the bottom corner there. Chapter 1 verse 18. This is the big deal. The big deal is that God's wrath or the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and literally unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth by that unrighteousness.

[5 : 56] Or over to chapter 2 on the right-hand column there. Chapter 2 verse 5. Start of the paragraph there. But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself. For the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

For God will repay each person according to what they have done. And that's a problem for us because we have not always done good. We have not always been innocent.

See, the problem with being an unrighteous person, a person who has sinned, is that we face and deserve God's judgment, his wrath. Now, we saw that last week to avoid this judgment, the Jews tried to obey the law and make themselves righteous, make themselves good and upright.

They tried to obey the law so that they could be innocent and avoid God's judgment. The problem was they couldn't obey the law all the time, could they? Last week I promised a kid at J Kids, which is our primary age kids club, I promised them a lolly if they were good for five minutes.

Oh, that's ten minutes. Five minutes. And they couldn't do it. And this time it wasn't my kids, so I was quite glad about that. But we're all the same.

[7 : 11] Jews are the same as well. They broke God's laws just like everyone else. And so no one can be made righteous by obeying God's law. And so that's the conclusion that we reached at the end of last week.

So have a look at chapter 3, verse 20. The verse just before our passage today. Chapter 3, verse 20. Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by works of the law.

Because we just can't keep them. Rather, through the law, we become conscious of our sin. And so it's at this point that Paul announces another way, apart from the law, another way to be declared righteous with God.

To be declared innocent in God's sight. And that way is now being revealed. Which brings us to point one. We've just done the recap. So point one, verse 21. He says, But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known.

To which the law and the prophets testify. Do you see it there? Another way to be declared right with God. To be declared innocent in God's sight. Has now been made known.

[8 : 21] It's been revealed. But notice, it's not an entirely new way, is it? The law and the prophets, which is a way of saying the Old Testament. Talk about this way.

Point to this way. Like in places like Isaiah 53 or Genesis 15. We'll look at Genesis 15 next week. But Paul's point here is that this way to be declared innocent is apart from the law.

It does not involve us having to always keep the law. To earn our right standing before God. So, how does this new way come about?

Well, verse 22 tells us. It says, This righteousness of God. The of God's missing there. This righteousness of God is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

That sentence is the heart of the gospel message. Indeed, it is the heart of Christianity. God gives us his righteousness so he can declare us innocent, upright, good, holy in his sight.

[9 : 31] And how do we receive his righteousness? Well, it says through faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, it's by trusting in Jesus as your king that God gives you his righteousness.

And this is the way that everyone can receive this right standing. It says, It is for all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile, Aussie or Chinese, Sri Lankan or Indian and so on.

It's not just one way for the Jews and another way for the rest of us. No, it's by faith alone for all of us. For all who believe. And when we believe in Jesus as our king, then God declares us righteous in his sight.

He says, I now consider you innocent, good, upright, one of my perfect people. It doesn't mean, of course, we are now perfect or always do the good things, the right things. But when it comes to God's verdict on us, it is no longer guilty. It is innocent. It's as though he says, You're innocent in my eyes, for I have given you what you lacked.

[10:38] I have given you my righteousness because you believed in my son. I've got an illustration here and it's for the kinesthetic learners, the people who learn by doing.

So here I've got my black jumper on and this represents sin. Okay, guilt. All right, let's see if we can pin it together like this.

All right, here we go. I used to be a primary school teacher and much better at this. All right, okay. Black jumper represents sin and guilt. Okay, because I sin, I'm guilty.

All right, not righteous. And then what God does is he says, Because you believe in my son, I'm going to give you my righteousness or Christ's righteousness. So here we are. Yeah.

Now, underneath, I'm still sinful, right? But when God looks at us, this is what he sees. His righteousness. And so he can declare us innocent.

[11:50] My collar's showing? There's no sin showing? No, he doesn't see him. Okay. In his sight, we are declared righteous. Okay. Does that make sense? Yep. Just say yes so you can encourage me.

I know I'm righteous. All right, good. Excellent. All right.

This is the great news of the gospel. But there is a problem with it. There is a problem with it. And the problem is this. How can God be a God of justice and simply just declare us who are unrighteous as though righteous?

How can God be a God of justice and simply announce that we, the guilty, are now innocent? I mean, if a judge today did that in a court of law, we'd be up in arms.

If a criminal came up and the judge said, oh, well, you're guilty, but I'm going to declare you innocent. Off you go. We'd go, hang on. So how can God do that? That was the particular issue for the Jews.

[12:53] And to answer that issue, Paul unpacks for us the process of how we are declared righteous or literally righteousified. That's what the word means, righteousified, which is point two in verse 22.

Have a look at the rest of verse 22. He unpacks it for us there. Okay. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. How does this work? Well, for there is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are made declared righteous, righteousified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood to be received by faith. Here it's like Paul has lifted the hood of a car to show how the engine works to enable the car to move.

Except here he shows how the death of Christ works to enable God to declare people righteous and still be just himself.

And he starts where we started by saying that we have all sinned and lack God's glory, the righteous character of God. That's what we lack. And no matter what we do, we cannot get it back. Because we cannot persistently do good or be upright.

[14:09] So we deserve God's wrath. But the great news here is God gives us what we don't deserve. We deserve judgment, but he gives us his righteousness instead. He declares us innocent when we deserve to be punished as guilty.

And that's grace, he says. It says the righteous is by God's grace. Grace is undeserved generosity. So some time ago, I used to be a youth group leader. And one night we were talking about this idea of grace.

Grace is about grace. And there was one kid in the group who was being particularly silly. So to illustrate the idea of grace to the kids, I pulled out a \$20 note from my wallet and said, God's grace is about God's generosity to us when we don't deserve it.

I said, here you go, Ben. That was a naughty kid. I gave it to him. He said, can I have this? Can I keep it? He said, yep, it's yours. And you know what happened, of course. All the other kids said, hang on a second. How's that fair?

He doesn't deserve that. I said, exactly. That's grace. Paul says this righteousness is by grace. It's a free gift that we don't deserve.

[15:11] This righteousness from God costs us nothing. But it costs Jesus everything. It costs him his blood, which is another way of saying it costs him his life. And in doing so, Jesus has done two things.

First, he redeems us. Did you see that? Verse 24, through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. To redeem something means to buy it back.

It's a business term. For the ancient slave world in particular, if a person was sold into slavery because they were poor, then a relative could redeem them, buy them back by paying a ransom. And here we are sold to sin, as it were, facing judgment. And the cost of our redemption, the cost of our ransom is the blood of Jesus. And Jesus willingly pays it, he says.

And in so doing, he not only redeems us, but secondly, he atones for us and our sins. He satisfies God's right anger and the punishment that anger demanded.

[16:13] That's what we saw from our first reading from the Day of Atonement, where blood is sprinkled on the atonement cover to satisfy God's just anger at our sin. Atonement is about satisfying God's anger at our sin.

A few years ago in Denver, a boy was caught stealing \$100 from a relative's wallet. His father was angry, furious. He was angry and rightly so. What the boy had done was clearly wrong.

And to satisfy the father's right anger, his son had to cop a punishment. He had to atone for his sin. Except this punishment was rather unusual. On the next slide, he had to stand on a curb holding up a sign that says, I am a thief.

I took money from my family member. Don't give me any money. Now, I'm not sure I would have done that myself. But notice the headline of the newspaper article. It says, Dad has son atone for theft.

You see, the son atones for his sin and satisfies the father's anger. And that's exactly what Jesus does, except for us. Jesus, the son, atones for our sin and satisfies God's right anger at our sin.

[17:28] On the next slide is a verse from a song that we often sing here. It's called In Christ Alone. Do you notice halfway down? Till on that cross, as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied.

That's what Jesus is doing. That's atonement. And that means we can be put right with God. His anger is satisfied. On the next slide is a way of remembering what the word atonement means.

It means at-one-ment. Underneath is the technical word for the really keen beings out there, propitiation. But atonement means at-one-ment. Being made one with God again.

Being restored in relationship. If I offended my wife, if, and buy a bunch of flowers to atone for my mistake, then the flowers, hopefully, would make atonement.

Would restore the relationship. We'd be at one again. That's the idea here. Jesus' blood shed on the cross. His life given as a ransom. His suffering of God's wrath in our place.

[18:34] It pays for our sin and makes us right with God. Restores the relationship so that we can be declared righteous again. That's how it works. But our righteousness is not actually the primary purpose of this passage.

It's not even the primary purpose of Christ's death for us. So what is? What reason did God do all this? Well, have a look at halfway through verse 25.

We'll pick it up there. Verse 25. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness. Because in his forbearance, he had left the sins committed beforehand in the past unpunished.

He did it to demonstrate his righteousness, his justice at the present time. So that he can be both just and the one who justifies or declares righteous.

Those who have faith in Christ. You see why God did this? It says to demonstrate or to show his justice. You see, for God to be righteous and just, he must punish sin appropriately.

[19:44] That's justice. We all know that. But at the same time, God loves us deeply. And so how can he be just and punish sin and at the same time help us to escape punishment?

Well, the answer is Jesus. Jesus dies in our place as our ransom to make atonement for our sin. And by doing so, God remains just. He punishes sin.

It's just that Jesus takes that punishment. And so at the same time, we can be forgiven. We can receive God's love. We can receive God's righteousness. I heard a story once of a judge in early Australian history.

I'm not sure if it's true, but it illustrates the point nonetheless. Apparently, a boy was brought to the judge for a number of crimes he had committed. And in those days, your punishment was often whipping.

Okay. And depending on how many crimes you did determined how many lashes of the whip you received. And the problem for the boy is he had done a number of crimes.

[20 : 43] And it added up to a number of lashes. 50, I think, from memory. Now, the judge knew that a boy of this age and size would not survive a sentence like that.

50 lashes was a death sentence for the boy. Yet in those days, this was justice. And so he had to carry out the sentence. And so the judge read out the sentence, banged the gavel, and the boy's face sank.

The judge ordered the boy be led out to the whipping post. And the judge followed behind. But before the boy got to the post, the judge took off his coat and his shirt, then placed his hands at the whipping post and gave the order for the 50 lashes to begin.

You see, the judge still upheld justice, didn't he? The crime was still paid for, 50 lashes. But at the same time, because he took it, he could save the boy.

That's what God has done for us in Jesus. In doing so, God's character is highlighted. For we see at the cross that God is both just, he punishes sin, but he's also loving.

[21 : 50] He allows us to escape. We see God punishing sin appropriately and God loving us deeply. So what does all this righteousness mean for us, which is our final point?

Point three. Well, the first question to ask is, do you believe? Do you have faith in Jesus? Do you believe in him as your king? Because as we've seen, being declared right in God's sight is only by faith, by belief, by trust.

They all mean the same thing. By faith in Jesus. So, do you have faith? Do you believe in Jesus? Because without trust in Jesus, then you are declared currently as unrighteous.

And you will face God's wrath. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus? Please do. And for us who do, then secondly, it means extraordinary blessings, like having peace with God now, and the certain hope of glory later in heaven.

And that hope, says Paul in chapter 5, helps us to persevere now through whatever suffering we face in this life, knowing that the life to come will be, you know, more than make up for it. But that is chapter 5, and so I won't say more about it now.

[23 : 01] Thirdly, though, we are to serve him because of what he's done for us. You see, if we understand how unrighteous we are, and what God has done for us to, you know, clothe us with his own righteousness, then it ought to move us to serve him, to be thankful.

That's what Paul will say later on in chapter 12, where he says, In view of God's mercy, now offer yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

But fourth, and the main application for us from this passage, I think, is the one that Paul highlights himself in verse 27. Have a look there. He says, Where then is boasting? It is excluded.

Because of what law or principle? You know, the principle that requires works? No. Because of the principle that requires faith. For we maintain that a person is justified, declared righteous, righteousified by faith, apart from the works of the law.

You see, if we are declared righteous and saved from God's wrath by believing, you know, without earning it through our good deeds, without contributing to our salvation, then if it's all a gift of God, we cannot boast in it, can we?

[24 : 18] We've done nothing to earn it. Now, God declares us righteous by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Nothing to do with us and what we've done.

We cannot boast in ourselves. It's all God's work. So if we are to boast, then we are to boast in God and his son. You see, sometimes we are so human-centered that we keep thinking Jesus' death is all about us.

And it is in part. But it's primarily about God. He does this for us, yes, but in doing so, he demonstrates his justice and love, as we saw.

He shows us his grace and his glory. And so we ought to thank God for his character. We ought to praise him for his grace and greatness. We should boast in his glory and goodness.

I'm assuming you have all heard about the executions earlier this week. Judy prayed about them earlier on. There's no doubt that these men, Andrew and Myron, were not righteous.

[25 : 24] Though I personally don't think what happened was just. I think the punishment exceeded the crime. But there's no question that these men were not righteous. They carried drugs. And although Andrew was never declared righteous, in the sight of the Indonesian government, after 10 years in prison, would have thought that would have been enough.

He was, though, declared righteous in God's sight. Because he did turn to Christ, 2004. He did have faith in Jesus. And that meant he actually did serve God.

He did seek to be holy and pleasing to God, which was our third point of application. In fact, in 2013, after being sentenced to death, this is what he said to the media. He said, When I returned to my cell, I asked, God, I asked you to set me free, not kill me.

But God spoke to me and said, I think it's on the slide, sorry. Andrew, I have set you free from the inside out. I have given you life. And Andrew says, from that moment on, I haven't stopped worshipping him, serving him.

I've never sung before, never led worship, until Jesus set me free. He declared right with God, and he serves God, in jail, no less.

[26 : 40] What's more, he helped others, he ran workshops and so on, such that even the jailers did not want him to be executed, we're told, because he was a model citizen who improved the whole jail. In view of God's mercy, he did offer himself for God's service, holy and pleasing to him.

But he did not boast about it, because he also understood that he had done nothing to deserve it. Instead, he boasted in the Lord Jesus. And so, just days before he died, on the next slide, he wrote a letter to his nephew, Kai, and he said this, he finished the letter by saying, keep looking to Jesus, Kai, trust in his ways, and learn from my mistakes.

I love you always, your Uncle Andrew. You see, he not only served God because of this righteousness he'd received, he boasted in Christ because of it.

Christ who died to bring it to him. He boasted in the Lord Jesus by pointing others, like his nephew, to Jesus and not to himself. This is how we need to respond.

As it says in the words of our next song, which we're about to sing, I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom, but I will boast in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection.

[27 : 52] May we, to boast in him. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this short but very heavy passage with lots of terms in it, but we thank you that they speak great truths, that because of Jesus, we can be declared innocent in your sight.

We can be restored to relationship with you. we can have confidence that we will not face your judgment on the last day. Father, help us to boast in you and what you have done for us through the Lord Jesus and not ourselves.

Help us to point others to the Lord Jesus, we pray, not for our glory but for yours. We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.