

The Gift

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[0 : 00] Well, now, if you're new with us, we take the Bible in our hands at this point, and it would be good if you turned to Romans chapter 3 on page 941.

And because this is such a rich and wonderful passage, I've printed a sort of a David Short edition on the front of your service sheet.

And I know you've only got two hands, but it would be great if you had the yellow David Short translation in front of you, as well as the Bible, in case we stray off the passage a little bit from time to time.

Now, I wonder what you feel and what you think when you hear the word righteous and righteousness, as it's come so often in this reading. Is it something cold, hard and distant and just not relevant?

Or is it something warm and personal and hopeful? We don't use the word much in conversation today. Although if you're a child of the 60s and 70s, you will have used it as a slang equivalent for cool, groovy, wizard, out of sight and radical.

[1 : 17] And if you still use any of those words, you need to see Dan Giffen afterwards and repent. Probably the most common way or common place we use righteousness these days is around food.

There's a whole smorgasbord of new books which use the language of righteousness, morality, purity and guilt, referring to foods, not to people or their actions. So to be a really good person, you need righteous recipes, righteous tofu burger, righteous queso without processed cheese, righteous raspberry lollies without dairy or refined sugar, so that you and your children can eat with a clear conscience.

And the core idea of the new food movement is that by changing the way we eat, we can save ourselves and our world. I recently got this letter from the Supreme Master of an International Association, addressed to the Reverend David Short, Your Noble Holiness.

I figure if Dan gets Archdeacon, why can't I be Noble Holiness? They are trying to enlist my help and your help to stamp out the four great evils of our world, eating meat, drinking alcohol, smoking tobacco and having addictive drugs.

And the letter finishes with this, your loving members will appreciate everything that you do, respect your guidance. They will love and remember you for saving the world for generations to come.

[2 : 53] Your great deeds and name leading the way to save the earth will be engraved in history forever for all to revere and emulate.

Heaven will reward your holiness greatly. Let's close the service, shall we? Now, there's a Christian author by the name of Leslie Leland Fields who writes that this has led to a new disorder called orthorexia, which is an unhealthy obsession with healthy eating.

And she tells the story of Stephen Bratman, who is a Colorado nutritionist, who was so obsessed with eating healthy, he moved to a commune and managed an organic farm.

And he wouldn't eat any vegetable from the garden that had been plucked more than 15 minutes previously. He ate alone and chewed each bite 50 times, all of which left him feeling, quoting him, clear-headed, strong and self-righteous.

He writes, But he said, Now, I think that's a wonderful picture of how we take God's good gifts and we seek our righteousness, righteousness or our self-justification in them, whether it's food or family or fun or finance.

[4 : 49] And the reason I'm saying this is because this passage, Romans 3, 21 to 26, is the mother load of righteousness in the New Testament.

Seven times the apostle used righteousness language here. Some commentators say it's the most important paragraph in Romans. Some say it's the most important paragraph in the Bible.

One commentator says it's the most important paragraph ever written. Well, okay, but it's not an easy passage. And the reason it's not an easy passage is because the spotlight is relentlessly on God and not on us.

It's told from God's point of view. It's the demonstration of God's righteousness, not ours. And that's hard for us as the most self-preoccupied generation that's ever lived, who find it hard to even see the relevance of something unless it puts me at the center.

So I've translated it on the front of the bullet. And if you just look at that for a moment, you can see at the top, the Greek word for righteous is exactly the same as just. Well, the Greek word for justice is righteousness.

[6 : 07] Justified means to be declared righteous. And what is at stake in this passage is the reputation and the righteousness of God.

So I want to ask four questions. Why, where, what, how of God's righteousness? Why, what, where, how of the righteousness of God?

Firstly, why does God need to show his righteousness? If you've been with us in the first three chapters of Romans, Paul has presented us with a kind of dilemma for God.

I'm speaking just in a human way. God loves us. He loves each of us. He burns with love for us. But he's also holy and he must punish wickedness.

He must punish sin and injustice and evil, even if he doesn't want to punish us as sinners. Or let me put it a different way. Let's put this from the human side.

[7 : 06] As human beings before the God of the scriptures, we have a double problem. On the one hand, I have no righteousness of my own that I can offer God.

I cannot stand before him as I am because his holiness and his righteousness cannot welcome sinfulness into its presence. On the other hand, because of his holiness, God must punish evil and injustice and sin.

And therefore, I stand rightly under his wrath. Now, people usually come up with two ways to dodge that dilemma. One of two ways. Either they say, well, one day God's love will completely swallow his holiness.

On judgment day, God will pat us on the head and let us in and he'll say, there, there, it doesn't really matter. And I know that sounds good.

And I've heard a lot of Christians talk that way. But when you think about it, it's awful. Because what that means is that any victim of injustice does not matter.

[8 : 14] The millions who are butchered in Cambodia, they don't matter. The millions in the gas chambers, they don't really matter. The victims of the serial rapist and murderer, Colonel William Russell, they don't matter.

Clifford Olson's victims, they don't matter. Because justice is often not done in this world. And it's a horrifying thought to think that God will never execute justice.

So although this first dodge sounds good, it creates a God in the end who's not worth worshipping. He's an unrighteous God. He's corrupt. The second thing people say is, we're not really as bad as all that, are we?

Which only means that they are not living in the same world that we're living in. And not reading the same newspapers that we are. Did you notice the deafening silence as we came into this passage? If you have your Bible, look at 319, just before our passage. Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law.

[9 : 27] So that every mouth will be stopped. And the whole world be held accountable to God. Every mouth will be stopped.

The trial is over. All have been found guilty. All that is left is for the sentence of condemnation. The first three chapters, Paul has eviscerated our positive, rose-colored, inflated, sentimental view of ourselves.

He's lacerated our self-righteousness. Because none of us have loved God with all our hearts. None of us have loved our neighbors as ourselves. We've done the opposite. And unless something happens, we can't see the face of God.

We stand under his wrath. I mean, if you dedicated the next 10,000 years of your life to works of compassion and generosity and kindness, you'd still stand under God's wrath.

I think probably the best way of putting this why question is in verse 23 in our passage. If you look at it on the front of the bulletin. For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and lack, literally it

says, the glory of God.

[10:44] This is a very familiar verse, isn't it? The effect of our sin is that we lack the glory that God had made us for and made for us and intended for us and gave us.

We've traded it away. We've exchanged it. We've exchanged it.

That's why Paul said flat out in verse 10 of the same chapter, no one is righteous. No, not one. As we are, my friends, none of us can please him.

Left to ourselves, none of us can stand in his presence. What we need is two things. We need God to find a righteousness so that we might stand before him.

And we need God to punish evil, to execute his wrath, to do justice. Otherwise, the moral fabric of the universe unravels. And I think it's here where Christianity is so hard or so shockingly different.

[12:11] And this is where people stumble on Christianity. Most religions teach us to live a righteous life, to build up our virtue so that we will be accepted by God and we will reach enlightenment.

But the Christian gospel says we just cannot do it. And, you were waiting for this. And that God in his heart-breaking grace and love has done it for us.

That is why the righteousness of God needs to be shown. Second question. Where will God find a righteousness that will please him?

Verse 21 on the front of the bulletin. But now the righteousness or the justice of God has been manifest apart from the law, though the law and the prophets bear witness to it.

He's talking about the coming of Jesus and you can feel his excitement. But now there is a new thing, a demonstration of righteousness in the world. The very thing that God had commanded and promised through the Old Testament prophets.

[13:17] Adam had failed. Israel had failed. We have all failed. But there is one who has lived a life and revealed the righteousness of God. And it is a righteousness which pleases God because it is his very own righteousness manifest in Jesus.

Verse 22, please. The righteousness of God through the faithfulness. It's a much better way of translating it. The faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe.

See, what we need is someone to obey the law perfectly. Jesus lived a flawless life. No sin. Faultless.

Remarkable beauty. Perfect in faith and obedience and trust and love. When he was baptized, God the Heavenly Father spoke from heaven audibly and said, This is my beloved son.

In him I'm well pleased. My verdict is absolute approval on Jesus and his life. Jesus was utterly faithful, utterly righteous. He trusted in God.

[14:20] He faced vicious temptation. His faith was battered throughout his life. And in the Garden of Gethsemane he was tempted in ways I don't think you and I could even imagine.

He learned obedience through what he suffered so that he could be the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. If you have your Bible open, flick one page to chapter 5 verse 19.

Here Paul is contrasting Adam and Jesus. He says, 5:19, For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

See? Jesus has reversed the disobedience of Adam. When we look at Jesus, we're not just looking at a good man, decent, upright, pays his taxes.

We're looking at the very heavenly righteousness of God itself in human form in a perfect life. This is where God finds a righteousness for us.

[15:28] And that takes us to the third question. It takes us to the what. You see, okay, Jesus is righteous, but what about the wrath?

We're back to this punishment and wrath question. What can satisfy the righteous wrath of God? What can possibly exhaust his righteous wrath and anger at my sin? That's point three.

The fact that Jesus was righteous is incredibly impressive. But what does that have to do with me? What about the things that I've done that defy God, that I've thought and I've said?

You know, this morning, the things that I've thought and said. To say nothing of the things that I've not done to love him and to love others. How can God be just and justify me when I'm patently unjust?

I mean, how can God be righteous and declare any of us righteous when we are demonstrably unrighteous? I mean, we are outraged when judges do this, aren't we? When judges make unrighteous judgments, it causes great pain and evil flourishes like a noxious gas.

[16:33] We hate it at a hockey game when the referee is unfair. And we would hate it if God turned a blind eye to sin. Because then he would have to turn a blind eye to all evil and nothing would matter anymore.

And this is particularly acute for God. Because again and again and again in the Old Testament, he says very clearly, I will not acquit the guilty. In fact, Proverbs says, He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord.

Verse 24. On the front of the bulletin. All have sinned and lacked the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

This is the first use of the verb justified in Romans. God is not turning a blind eye to sin. It's not that he suddenly makes a deep moral change in each of us and makes us righteous, although it will lead to that.

It is a change of status. In Jesus Christ, God treats us as righteous and declares us as righteous through the redemption.

[17:53] It is more than forgiveness. It's more than just getting out of jail and getting out of punishment. It's God's decision, this justify, of the last day. It's him saying, you are righteous, brought back into now.

And the redemption word, remember, is the Exodus word. It's the rescue. We're under the power of sin. We're slaves of sin. But the death of Jesus is the liberty from that power.

But what happens to God's wrath? Keep reading verse 25. The redemption that's in Christ Jesus. Whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood.

We are on very holy ground here. We are on very holy ground here. Propitiation simply means a sacrifice that exhausts and satisfies someone's anger or wrath.

There is no hint of the pagan idea that we have to do something to pacify a vengeful God and buy him off. In the cross of Jesus Christ.

[18:57] In the cross of Jesus Christ, God directs his own righteous wrath against himself in the person of his son.

As Jesus dies on the cross, God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. I think this is very moving. When you are deeply wronged, you've got one of two choices, haven't you?

You either punish the other person or you bear the pain yourself. And it's a weak illustration of the agony that Christ bore and God bore in himself.

Jesus Christ, God the Son from all eternity, who existed in love and delight and fellowship and joy with the Father and the Spirit. He enters the world as a baby. He always does the will of God in perfect righteousness.

And as he dies, he takes our sin into himself and takes the punishment that we deserve. He who knew no sin became sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

[20:06] In the cross, at last God has punished sins as they deserve. His righteousness is revealed once and for all. In Christ, God condemns sin in the flesh.

The cross is where the wrath of God is utterly satisfied at the cost of his own eternally precious Son. It's God bearing our pain in himself.

And when he suffered death upon the cross for our redemption, he made there by his one oblation of himself once offered a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

That's why at the end of the passage, there's this burst of praise for the double show of God's righteousness. Just look at the end of verse 25. This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance, he'd passed over former sins.

The death of Jesus shows that, well, let me put it this way. Once you see the holiness of God against all that's unrighteous, it's hard to understand how God could have put up with all the injustice and all the brutality and all the wickedness that happened before Jesus Christ.

[21:33] I mean, why didn't God just execute punishment on those who kidnapped and tortured children? The answer is his divine forbearance.

He passed over the wretchedness of human sin for centuries, waiting for the day when he could put forward his wrath on himself in the person of his Son in a way that he could save us, demonstrating that he is righteous.

And what that means is that we either let Jesus Christ take the wrath of God for us, or one day we will need to bear it ourselves. Or look at the second showing, verse 26.

It was to show his righteousness at the present time, that he might be just and the justifier, the one who has faith in Jesus. God is just and justifier of unjust humans.

I don't want to steal Dan's thunder from next week, but just look down at, if you've got the Bible open, chapter 4, verse 5. To the one who does not work but believes, and now here's a description of God, believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

[22 : 48] God justifies the ungodly and shows himself righteous in doing it. So, in a sense, there's no dilemma for God. It's not as though inside God there's a struggle between his love and his holiness.

In the cross of Jesus Christ, the love and holiness of God kiss one another. In his death, we see the holiness of God against sin and the heartbreaking love of God for us.

Why of God's righteousness? The where, the what of God's righteousness? And finally and fourthly, how does God give us his righteousness? I mean, if Christ has earned a righteousness that pleases God, and if Christ has paid for sins and satisfied God's wrath, how does it come to us?

By faith, by faith, by faith, by faith, by faith, by faith, and not by works. That's what Paul says in this passage.

Just look at 3.20. By works of the law, no flesh, literally, will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

[24 : 03] But now, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, apart from works of the law. We have no righteousness of our own to offer God, despite our desperate attempts.

It's not that God does some righteous things and we mix it together with ours. It's not that Jesus does a lot of righteousness and then we add a little bit to ours. Our works play no part in our justification.

Look at verse 28. The whole flavour of this passage is the amazement at the freedom of God's grace.

Verse 24. We are justified by his grace as a gift. That's why it has to be by faith. Because God offers to transfer the righteousness of Christ, his own righteousness, to us by faith.

This is the hardest thing to get. He gives us his righteousness while we are still ungodly. And the only way to receive his righteousness is to abandon any hope of producing our own.

[25 : 18] The righteousness that Christ has earned for us is complete and pristine and pure and perfect. It's God's own righteousness. It's the only kind that will meet his approval.

And before God, we either trust his righteousness or our own. And you can't stand for long with one foot on a rock and the other on quicksand.

That is why Paul keeps saying in this passage, three times, four times, five times, by faith, by faith, by faith. Because what faith does is it lays hold of the person of Jesus Christ.

And you can't separate Jesus and his righteousness. So if your faith lays hold of Jesus, we become members of him, united to him.

We have everything that's good in him. When we place our faith in Jesus, God forgives us all our sin and covers us with the righteousness of Christ.

[26 : 21] It's a gift. We receive it. It comes from outside ourselves. It's what's in him. It's not what's in us. And it's absolutely and utterly revolutionizing.

If we take hold of Jesus and his righteousness, it makes us different people. I think you can come to church for many years and not get this. You can come to church and think that Christianity is about forgiveness of sins and trying harder.

Forgiveness of sins and trying harder. And you come to church and your sins are forgiven. You go and you try harder and you fail and you come back. And your sins are forgiven and you try harder. You never really go anywhere. And true transformation seems like a cruel dream.

And what is so difficult for us is the sheer freeness of this. It's the giftishness of it, as it were. To know that I stand in Jesus Christ righteous by faith.

Utterly, completely, pristinely pure in Jesus Christ. That is the infinite difference between trying to please God so that I'll be accepted by him.

[27 : 31] And being accepted by him so now I please him. There's an infinite gap between those two things. And not just accepted by him, but eternally, permanently, expensively, joyfully, not just accepted but approved.

And that is the wellspring of a life of righteousness. And it frees us from fear and it frees us from the treadmill of self-righteousness. And I finish with this.

I think Paul is trying to reach our hearts. Because again and again you'll notice the passage is full of the language of public display. God's showing, he's displaying, he's putting forward.

It's meant to change our hearts. The death of Jesus is not a bookkeeping exercise. It's not a cold legal transaction if there is such a thing.

It's deeply, deeply costly. Cost is blood. It is the place where God's glory and reputation confront our evil and sin.

[28 : 34] And the blaze of the love and righteousness of God comes through the death and the resurrection of Jesus. And that is where God establishes for all eternity his royal righteousness. So I've got to ask you, have you received it?

Have you received the free gift of righteousness in Jesus Christ? Is your faith in him and his righteousness? Or are you still trying to make your own?

We need to go to him and ask his forgiveness and ask him to cover us with his righteousness. This is the first day of Advent. If this is the first day that you cast all your hope and all your future on Christ Jesus, it would be a very bright day indeed.

So let's kneel and pray. As you go to another day of Advent 2nd Marty jetty, because you will have to do he■eweled vessels, so it will be a bridge to Mike's address to him and show his character thereforeétimo Macki.

After■■■ory Joe Townsend,■■■ you will need to subscribe to our website to the Kim EK projects of 2020. constitutes aanna Nick Jesna to jump in on Sunday. The lust of Monaten of Friday is that he is a■ at theenanigans, where he does■■■■ even if he has no way to commemorate, donde he is an age oficho, so he can refer to Korean Mirror.

[29 : 44] Sover209 is to replace prayer when he is an age of month, because he pulls up Baltimore from 2nd Morta■ and Mr.sr essentially . You will hold down hyvä to they become dominant when he is wearing this height of child.