

Right with God

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Preacher: James Barnett

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. There is a psychological phenomenon, if I can say that word, phenomenon called illusory superiority.

It's a mental bias where a person overestimates their own qualities or abilities. And so surveys have been done where a hundred people were asked a question and the vast majority of people rated themselves as better than average as drivers, which just can't be true if you ask a hundred people. The same goes if you ask people to rate their own intelligence or rate themselves how funny they are or how attractive they are or how charitable or generous they are.

The vast majority of people rate themselves as better than average. Positive traits like these are often hard to define. And there's often this wiggle room to make us think, oh yeah, I think I'm a pretty good driver.

I reckon I'm better than everybody else. But it means that we end up building an over-inflated sense of self. There's one group that's immune to this. Those that are depressed or have anxiety.

[1 : 11] They often rate themselves the opposite way, lower than the average. Now, we're not going to do a survey here. You know, we could do a quick survey. You know, pull out your phones, rate yourself. If you think you're better than everybody else at driving, we're not going to do that.

But it points to how we view ourselves. We have a skewed sense of self. And I wonder if it's possible that we bring this skewed sense of self before God.

I wonder if we compare ourselves to others when we're thinking about our place before God. Would we think that we are more deserving of God's love and his forgiveness than other people?

Is it possible then that we even extend this illusory superiority to other people and think, Oh, well, do you know what? You know, I'll point at James Cason. I often like to pick on James Cason.

So I'll pick on James Cason. He's a pretty good bloke. You know, he seems to be a good young husband now. Do you know what? I reckon he's right with God too. Because he seems to be a pretty good bloke. We are swimming in a culture which tells us that we can have it all.

[2 : 23] Not only that, but we actually deserve it all. We deserve to have everything good. I was walking home the other day and I saw a sign that said, You deserve a break.

Have a Kit Kat. And I thought, you know what? I think I've already had three Kit Kats today, so I probably shouldn't have another one. So when it comes to righteousness with God, is it possible that we view ourselves and we view others as deserving of righteousness?

Deserving of good things from God? Because, you know what? We're pretty good people. So not only culture tells us that, you know, we're deserving. Every other religion says you can do it.

You can deserve good things. Other religions build up performance records so you can be right with God. Whether it's following the eightfold path or removing suffering or doing the duty of your caste. Each is something that goes on a performance record that we hold in our minds or on our souls that we present to God on the day of judgment. So when it comes to the good news of the gospel, there can be this expectation that it is earned.

[3 : 38] We can hold this view that, do you know what? Good from God must be earned. But also, I'm a pretty special person. I'm a good guy.

You know, I'm just like James. I'm a good husband. And, you know, God deserves, he really should take care of me because I've earned it. And so when we hear the Bible read by Tanya just a moment ago, when it says that we are justified freely by God's grace, we think, yeah, sure.

But doesn't everybody have something to offer God? Doesn't everybody deserve something good from God? We're continuing in the book of Romans. And the first two chapters have really presented a radical opinion, something very contradictory to that worldview, that we all deserve something good from God.

And Paul in Romans 3 is really going to just nail home this view that we actually do not deserve anything good from God. And we come to what Martin Luther of the Reformation called the center of the Bible, which is a big claim.

And so we're going to see if it actually holds up to that. And the challenge for us today will be to see what we actually deserve from God and what he gives us and how.

[4 : 55] And a thing called justification by faith. And how wonderful it is that we do not deserve it, but it is offered to us freely. So let me pray for us as we look at Romans 3.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this chance to look at your word this morning. Heavenly Father, we have mixed expectations when it comes to you.

In the one sense, we expect good because we think we are good. But Lord, we also know we are full of sin and can struggle and feel anxiety when it comes to what we deserve from you.

Help us to know how to be right with you today, Lord. Amen. Amen. So please have Romans 3 open. Firstly, we'll see that from what Paul says, we deserve nothing.

If you've got the St. Paul's app there, you can follow along in the points. And if you don't have the app, there should be a little QR code in front of you on the seats. You can follow that to get the St. Paul's app. And Paul builds up a big argument about what we deserve from God.

[6 : 00] And it's not pretty. It's not pretty at all. Paul has been cutting away any ground to think that we are above average in God's sight. And it's made for uncomfortable listening in those first two chapters.

And in the first 20 verses of chapter 3, which we're going to look at briefly, Paul moves forward to the conclusion. At the end of verse 20, no one will be declared righteousness in God's sight.

So he's going to build up this big picture. And that's the spoiler. That's the end point. No one is righteous. Paul goes back and forward in the first nine verses. We're not going to look at the first nine verses in detail.

But Paul has this argument with himself. He asks this question and then he answers it. He does this several times. But they amount to being, well, isn't there an advantage for the Jew?

The Jew has been part of God's people for centuries and generations. They've had God's word for so long. Don't they get some benefit? Don't they have some advantage to having the very words of God, the Old Testament?

[7 : 03] And it's this comparison question. Comparatively, shouldn't the Jews deserve more from God? They've been God's people. They've had his law.

Surely God is going to judge them more favorably than those who've been far away from him.

Surely the Jews are closer to God. They're closer to righteousness.

They're closer to being accepted by God. But it's not about comparing ourselves to others. It's our position before God. It's a legal position.

Verse 9 describes us as all under the power of sin. Is there anybody here that likes to do lap swimming? Anybody that likes to have a good swim?

Paul, what is a long distance to swim? For you? Two Ks. Okay, two Ks. That sounds like a very long way for me. Two Ks sounds good.

[8 : 00] So Paul can be our benchmark. Now, imagine if there was a couple of us going for a swim. They were going to swim from Sydney to New Zealand. Okay? We've set ourselves a goal.

There's three people. There's one who can't swim at all. And they get out into Sydney Harbour. And because they can't swim, they go straight down. They sink and they drown.

The next swimmer, let's say it's Paul. We'll use Paul as an example. Thank you, dear brother. Let's say it's Paul. Pretty good swimmer. Paul's pretty fit. Liked to swim regularly. He gets out in the harbour.

He swims. He gets out of the harbour, out of the headlands. And he's doing really well. He beats his PB of 2K. He actually gets 5K. And then he sinks and he drowns.

Sorry, Paul. Nice knowing you, dear brother. The last person, well, let's say this third person is a champion swimmer. Champion Olympic level swimmer. Swims easily past Paul's PB.

[8 : 59] Does a little bit of wave on the way past. Gets 50 kilometres out. Straightforward. The next 100 kilometres is a struggle. The next 50 kilometres, they're just trying to stay afloat.

And then finally, they drown. And falling short by only 2,000 kilometres. Is that last Olympic swimmer who got closer more or less drowned than the others?

It doesn't matter. None of them get anywhere near their destination. The person who considers themselves moral and good. And the person who indulges in every fleeting sin and pursues everything.

Neither of them come even anywhere close to being righteous. They are equally alike. Far from God. There is such a gulf between righteousness and unrighteousness.

That our moral standing, all of our good works, have no ability to contribute anything to our salvation. And Paul gives a full picture of what it means to be far from God.

[10:05] And how fully we sin. And the reality of our sinfulness. He says, there is no one righteous. Not even one. It is this legal standing.

It is like saying a person is innocent or guilty. You can't be a little bit innocent or a little bit guilty. It is one or the other. And then verse 11.

It says that our minds are corrupt. No one understands God. No one seeks his truth. We can see, Romans has told us in chapter 1, that we can see God's goodness to us around us.

We can see it in his rising sun, in the fact that he provides us rain so that plants grow. Even if I wanted God to provide a little bit less rain. But Paul says we can't actually see God's goodness. We're blind to him. We can't see the reality of God around us. Our minds are darkened. We don't understand. Secondly, we don't seek God. Our motives are twisted.

[11:08] None of us really want to find God. Our will, we've actually chosen to turn away. And there's this horrible picture in verse 13 of our mouths.

Our throats are open graves. Our tongues practice deceit. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. It's this picture of our mouths as an open grave, as in just rotten.

Only rottenness comes out of our mouths. It's this horrible picture. Our relationships with people are damaged because we shed blood. There is no peace.

And finally, our relationship with God, well, we don't fear him. We don't fear God. We think we are God. We think we are in control. It is a detailed and depressing list.

But this is all people before God. All people in a position of unrighteousness. But also people who expect the very best from God.

[12:10] It is that illusion, illusionary superiority again. Where we view ourselves as actually being better than we really are. Can you imagine if Paul was writing a dating profile for all of humanity?

Well, pick on me at this point. Let's say, you know, this person in the dating profile. I never had to write a dating profile. I'm really thankful for that. Because I probably wouldn't write it like this. But let's say, writing a dating profile, okay, the person's 5'11".

They have whatever color hair this is. Orangey, blondy, brown. Like walks on the beach. Good so far. This person is guilty and condemned.

His mind is twisted and deranged. His heart cries out. His heart is selfish. He only ever chooses himself. Whenever he speaks, he puts down all of those around him.

He's a bully and he belittles people. He's full of cursing and bitterness. He's brought shame to his family. He's destroyed all his relationships, some by shedding blood, and he thinks he's God.

[13:18] Would you want to be with that kind of person? Would you want a family member to be dating that kind of person? And yet this is the person that Paul describes all of us to be.

No one seeks God. No one does good. And yet the wonderful truth is that God chooses to have a relationship with this kind of person.

How very thankful we should be. God chose to send his own Jesus for a despicable people. This is the theology of total depravity.

That we are totally depraved people. Completely sinful. Even when we do good, it is twisted by our sin. But. But.

Verse 21. But now. It's one of my favorite buts in the Bible. There's another really great but in Ephesians 2. Go and read that one as homework when you get home. But.

[14:18] In contrast to what Paul has just said. But now it is different. But now. Second point today. We get everything from God. Verse 21.

But now. Apart from the law. The righteousness of God has been made known. But now. In contrast to all that Paul has said.

About how he's described us to be before God. Now God has made his righteousness known. Before we were in a position of condemnation. But a new position is offered.

We spoke earlier about. How we often build up a performance record. Of good things that we do. To make us think we deserve God.

But now. Instead of our own performance record. God says there is a new performance record for you. Here you go. It's a totally unheard of approach. The good looking resume that we thought we had.

[15:17] Just totally didn't work. The righteousness of God. The right performance record. Is given to us. Verse 22. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

What an amazing, ridiculous and radical thing. Given freely. Offered, not earned. You know we might think we can try and swim to New Zealand.

But God is gifting us a plane ticket there. Here you go. You're just there. There is no comparison. We can try and fail.

Or have it given for free. And we come to the part of the Bible that Luther argued was the center. And this is a part of the Bible that is worth meditating on. It is worth memorizing.

If you're going to go from here and memorize one part of the Bible this week. It would be this. Romans 3.23 and 24. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

[16:18] And all are justified freely by his grace. Through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

And all are justified freely by his grace. How horrid would it be if Paul didn't have that and. If he just had the first part. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

But there is grace for all. Rather than us paying the penalty. The judge's son took our place. And we are given freedom.

It's the beautiful scandal of the cross. That the one who was not deserving of anything in verse 23. Is given everything.

By the one Jesus who does not do verse 23. He has not sinned. Jesus has not sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. He is the very glory of God. And yet he takes our place.

[17:17] This beautiful undeserved joy. Has layers to it. Verse 22. Says that it is presented. By Jesus's shedding of his blood.

Belief in God is not good enough. It's actually specific. It has to be belief in Jesus. Some might say. I'm so glad you have faith.

But it's not just faith in something. It is faith in Jesus. Received in Jesus. And as Paul has made painfully clear.

It has nothing to do with us. As Paul said. Oh let me go back. Back. Back. There we go. Justified freely by his grace.

Some of us can think of faith. As an intense attitude. I have to think really hard. I have to work really hard. I have to trust God really hard. To be justified.

[18:15] I have to have 100% certainty. That Jesus has saved me. That's what it means to be justified by faith. I need to work really hard. To make sure that I'm trusting him. At every moment. I know he did.

I sometimes have doubts. And I've got to get rid of those doubts. But that kind of faith. Just ends up becoming another work. It's not that faith in and of itself saves us.

It is the one who our faith is in. And it's freely given. From verse 25. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement.

Through the shedding of his blood. His death. His blood instead of ours. This free gift of grace is given. Freely to us. And received by faith.

Now imagine. That we still need to get to New Zealand. You know. We saw Paul try and swim. Did no good. And we thought. We need to get there. So flying is the best option.

[19:17] I don't know of anybody that has a boat. So we'll go with flying as the best option. And there's a spot that has been freely offered. And it's not just believing in flying. As the best option.

That will get us to New Zealand. Because if I thought it was just believing. If I thought it was just having faith in flying. As the best option. Do you know what I could do? I could strap on some wings. And try and flap myself to New Zealand.

It's not just believing. In something. That is going to save me. It's believing. In the right thing. The place of our faith is important.

Saving faith is only faith that is placed in Jesus. Has anybody actually been on a plane recently? Has anybody started flying again? A couple of us. Is anybody a particularly bad flyer?

Anybody really stressed by flying? There's one person down the front. Flying can be very stressful for some of us. Imagine you're on that plane. And some turbulence hits. And it's pretty bad. And you're worrying.

[20 : 15] Am I going to make it out of this alive? And you're breathing into that bag. So you don't hyperventilate. You've got white knuckles at every bump. Every gust of air. Your faith in the airplane is very weak.

And your faith in the pilot is very weak. And then sitting next to you. There's someone else on the plane. And their faith in the plane. And their faith in the pilot. Is very strong.

I love flying. Because it's just. You know. I get X amount of hours. To sit and read. To sit and watch movies. And to do whatever I like. The last flight I took. I remember. I was doing this.

I was reading. Before the plane took off. And I'm like. Oh we're taking off. Not even aware. That we were taking off. And we landed. It's just like. Oh we're landing. Great. And you know. You see other people. White knuckles.

For some of us. We can enjoy the journey. Trusting in the aeroplane. And the pilot. For the person whose faith is weak.

[21 : 15] And really stressed. The entire flight. And the person who is totally relaxed. They both actually get to the same destination. The captain doesn't actually come back to the person who's stressed.

And hyperventilating. And freaking out. The captain doesn't come back and say. Oh I'm sorry sir. I'm sorry ma'am. You can't actually be on this flight. You don't have enough faith. To keep this plane up.

We're actually going to have to. Throw you out the exit door. You don't get to go to the destination. Because you don't trust enough. It is the power of God to save.

Not my power of my faith. We fix our eyes on Jesus. The pilot. Who is pointing us to God. He doesn't say.

Oh look you're on the plane. But you must also flap your wings. Or you're not going to make it. You've got to be doing something. You've got to be really active while you're on the plane. Or you're not going to be saved. Jesus is the object of our faith.

[22 : 13] He is the one. Our faith is placed in. Not us. And this faith is a wonderful gift that has been given. This is what justification by faith is.

I'm saved by what Jesus has done. And this is a very important piece of theology for us Christians. And it's not just important for our minds.

It's important for our hearts. It's important for us to know. Because it's intensely personal for us all. The person who goes through life struggling. Believing that they're right with God.

The person who is anxious. The person who is worried that they're saved. Well this piece of theology actually helps us to grow in God confidence.

God I don't need to be anxious. I don't actually need to be worried. Because you have saved me. It is not my faith. It is where my faith is placed. Even if I have a tiny amount of faith in you.

[23 : 12] It is still in you. And I will still get to the destination. We don't need to compare ourselves to other Christians. Oh that Christian has so much faith.

This theology of justification by faith is a wonderful assurance to us. That it is not our performance. It is not how strong our faith is. It is where our faith is placed. In Jesus. Because all of us are going to stand before God one day. And justification by faith tells us we don't need to appeal to our performance record.

To our works. To the things we've done. We can't point out that. Well look at least I'm better than 50% of everybody else. Justification by faith is vital.

Because it reminds us. The very heart of the gospel. That our standing and acceptance before God. Is entirely from God. And so Paul says in verse 27.

[24 : 12] That there is no boasting. We don't boast about this. Instead we have joy. Thankfulness. Because our destination is sure. So. If we were going to survey everyone here.

If we were going to survey a hundred Christians. Whether we're more deserving of salvation than the person sitting next to you. Justification by faith tells us no. I am not more deserving.

It's not me. I don't deserve anything. But brothers and sisters. Justification by faith teaches us that we are so richly blessed by God. Freely through God's grace to us in Jesus' blood.

This theology of justification by faith helps us to grow in God confidence. And that's what we're doing. And that's what we're doing. And that's what we're doing. Maybe over the last year. The last two years. You've been feeling slack as a Christian.

You've been feeling like. I just. I don't feel like I'm doing the right things. You know. The church. You know. People at church keep encouraging me to read my Bible. You know. I've heard Steve and Dan talk about it this morning.

[25 : 13] And I want that. And I don't feel like I'm a good Christian. Our destination doesn't change. Because of where our heart is. It doesn't.

It doesn't mean that. Oh look. I'm not going to. I'm not going to be with God. Because I don't. I'm not feeling like I'm doing the right thing. This teaches us that. We don't need to have anxiety.

We don't need to worry about our destination. Instead. This is a wonderful call. That we can draw closer to him. Reminds us that our faith. Is not based on our own ability.

To fly. Or to swim to New Zealand. But we're able to rest in. And trust in God. For our salvation. So that as we journey. That we would grow.

In believing. That we would be able to place our faith. In him. As the object of our faith. And when we do that. We can have a journey. To him.

[26 : 09] That is. One. That's not white knuckled. But trusting. Even when turbulence hits. We can rest assured. That God. Has our destination.

Sure. And he is taking us there. Let me pray. Heavenly Father. We thank you for Romans 3. We thank you.

That even though. It points out. A hard and painful truth. About who we are. That it also points out. The wonderful good news. Of the gospel. That you have chosen.

To justify us freely. In Jesus's death. And resurrection. Heavenly Father. Help us not to trust. In our own ability. To do anything good.

But help us to place. Our faith in Jesus. We ask this in your son's name. Amen.