

FAITH ALONE Adrian Wong

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[0 : 00] think of a thing, a problem in life, in a subject at school that you've been stuck on and you find it hard to understand and no matter how hard you try, you can't get it.

So for example, it's maybe a concept in math or science. And so it's so hard, eventually you just drop the subject and you vow that in life you'll never have anything to do with that subject.

So throughout the last few weeks, we've been looking at some of the bigger issues that Luther and others were facing in the Reformation. So today we'll look at Martin Luther, the man, and we'll look at one of the issues that he's been wrestling with in the Bible and how today's passage, Romans chapter 3, verses 21 to 26, help him to understand this problem.

So we'll try something a little bit different today. So I'll ask the AV team to keep putting the Romans passage on the screen. So while I preach, we'll work through the passage together. So one of the other things I've been reminded of in the last couple of weeks is I went to Heartbeat a couple of weeks ago and one thing that Steve reminded me is to look at the Bible slowly.

So Romans 3 is a passage that a lot of us will know very well. So one thing that we need to do is actually slow down, look carefully and to make sure God is speaking to us.

[1 : 22] So I'm going to ask God to help us to do that. Let's pray. Dear God, we thank you for your word. We thank you that it is so precious. We are sorry at times.

We assume that we know it and we assume that what we have learned before will feed us. So pray that even for myself as I'm preaching right now, that we will look slowly at your word, that we will understand it and look intensely so that you will speak to us, so that you will change us for your sake.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So today the topic we have is faith alone. So faith alone is actually like a shortened cash cry for a bigger concept that we need to explore.

So the idea that we are trying to explore is how we can be justified by faith alone. So to understand these ideas well, we need to go back to the story of Luther. Because one of the concepts that Luther wrestled with is the righteousness of God, which is a word that's repeated many times in the book of Romans and in this passage.

So in particular, he struggled with chapter 1, verses 17 to 18. So I'll read those verses to you. Verse 17 in Romans 1 says, The righteous shall live by faith.

[2 : 41] And verse 18 says, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Luther said he hated Romans 1, verse 17 before he figured out what God's righteousness meant.

So that's what he wrote about this passage. I had been captivated with an extraordinarily ardour for the understanding of Paul in the epistle to the Romans.

But a single word in chapter 1, verse 17, in which the righteousness of God is revealed, stood in my way. For I hated that word righteousness of God, which I had been taught to understand is the righteousness with which God punishes the unrighteous sinner.

So that's what the church has taught him about 500 years ago, that God is the righteous judge and we are the unrighteous sinner. So he hated that word because he knows how unrighteous he is.

In fact, this word weighed on him so heavily. So before he depended fully on Jesus' salvation, it affected many aspects of his life. So there's another quote about what he tried to do in light of his unrighteousness.

[4 : 00] So that's how he saw Jesus, a terrible judge, sitting up high.

So this problem that Luther had isn't just his problem. It's actually everyone's problem. So one of the big questions we need to ask is, how can a righteous God pardon an unrighteous person?

So before we tackle this passage, I'd actually like to fast forward to the time that Luther understood the concept of God's righteousness and read his reaction to what he read.

So another quote, A night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that the just shall live by his faith. Then I grabbed that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy, God justifies us through faith.

Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and have gone through open doors into paradise. So we can actually see Luther's excitement when he finally understood what it means for the righteous God to justify him.

[5 : 37] And I hope by the end of this message that you will feel the same excitement that Luther felt when he first understood the passage. So to figure out what this passage means, I'll get the AB team to pop verse 21 on the screen of Romans chapter 3.

So if you have a Bible, please turn to that as well. So in verses 21 to 22, we notice a few different aspects of righteousness.

So righteousness is manifested apart from the law, but the law and the prophets bear witness to it. Righteousness is given by God, is obtained through faith in Christ Jesus for all who believe.

So let's look at each part of this sentence. The first part is that righteousness is manifested apart from the law. What this means is that we cannot become righteous by doing good things.

The law means the moral standard, revealed by God in the Ten Commandments, summarized by the Ten Commandments. So we can actually see why our works can't make us righteous in Romans chapter 3, verse 20.

[6 : 56] So just before verse 21, therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law. Rather through the law, we become conscious of sin. So just to understand why the law will make us conscious of sin, I'll give you an example that will be close to some people's heart, which is at this time of year, we can think about the tax season for those that are working.

For those that are studying, it's still, we've got a few years ahead of you. So if you think about the tax season, and you think about what we try to do with tax, is that a lot of people try to minimize the amount of tax we will pay.

So you see ads from an accounting firm, you probably see the accountant that was very excited when they got a maximum deduction. So that's what we feel sometimes.

So we try to push against the law and try to get everything that we can. But if we realize that God actually has appointed governments to rule this land, even if they don't do it perfectly, they still give us roads to drive on and social security and HECS and uni and all those things.

So we should actually be glad to pay tax so that the government can do their job. But our hearts try to go against what the government has said in the law and try to get as much as we can.

[8 : 19] So that's sort of similar to what we do when we look at God's law. So the law sets up the boundary in terms of what we can do, but our sinful hearts tend to try to push against the boundary.

So if the law says you have to drive at 60, you'll drive at 59 and a half or something like that. So that's how we look at God's law. We try to disobey as much as we can within the limits. So the law sometimes actually reveals how sinful our hearts are.

The second part of the sentence is that the law and prophet bear witness to this righteousness. I'll explain this concept by a conversation that I had at church and I was very happy to have that conversation.

There was a lady that is seeking to understand Jesus and she is still so we can pray for her. She has been doing some Bible studies and she's so interested in the Bible she has started to read it from the beginning.

And she asked me, like, I've read from Genesis to Leviticus so far and she thought that the God that is revealed in the Old Testament is very different from what she has heard in the Bible study.

[9 : 29] So she asked me, what does it mean? How does it work? And I actually thought that was an awesome opportunity to bring up this passage because it says the law and prophet testify about God's righteousness.

And in fact, today we will look at the different aspects in the Old Testament that Jesus has fulfilled. And the Old Testament actually points to Jesus and we'll actually see how that happens in the next few verses.

And the last bit of the phrase says that the righteousness is obtained through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believes. So if you look at that phrase, through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believes,

one of the first questions you might ask is, isn't Paul being a bit redundant and repetitive? He tells us to believe in Jesus Christ and then for all who believes. So why does he say that? Actually, that phrase, faith in Jesus Christ can be translated as faith of Jesus Christ. And that might actually make better sense of this passage. Because the thing that we need to believe is the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. How he is completely obedient to God and how he is completely obedient to death.

[10:47] So we will actually work out how Christ's faithfulness affect us. So that's the second question we need to ask. How does Jesus' faithful obedience to death make us right with God?

So Paul, in the book of Romans, to help us understand this concept, he paints sort of three mental pictures for us. So we will look at verse 24. The first word that God, that Paul uses is justified. We can see this word in verse 24. So when we think of the word justified, Paul is trying to get us to think of a law court with God as a presiding judge giving the verdict.

So, unfortunately, for Luther at the time, this concept of justification is sort of a bit clouded by the Latin Bible that he is reading and what he has been taught.

So, you see, the word justified comes from the Latin word *justificare*, which is like *justificare*. *Justy* is the righteous bit, like justice or righteousness.

[11:56] And *ficare* is the word to make. So if you combine the two words together, justification means to make righteous. So that's what the Roman Catholic Church taught 500 years ago.

And unfortunately, they still believe that right now. So basically, for someone to be righteous, you have to be made righteous by the religious works that you do. You have to trust in Jesus and you keep taking sacraments and doing all these religious good works to become righteous.

But when Luther looked at the Bible in Greek, he realised that justification isn't to make righteous, but rather for God to declare us righteous or to count us as righteous.

So the difference is if you are made righteous, God is trying to, you have to be changed to a certain moral standard before you can be accepted to God by God.

But what it means here is God as a judge is declaring that you are righteous from the outside. It's not about what we have been doing inside that matters. It's about God's verdict.

[13:07] That's the thing that makes us righteous. So we have to work out how can the question still stands so how can like a righteous God declare a sinful person to be justified?

So we have to actually look at the second picture that Paul is painting here. The second picture is actually a redemption. But before we do that, let's think about an illustration.

justification. So when you think of justification, you can think of maybe perhaps someone has committed a crime. So what Jesus has done in justifying us is that he steps into your place as an innocent man and actually goes to jail for you, basically.

He pays for the penalty that we deserve. The amazing thing about God is that God has not only taken away our sins, God has chose to put the obedience of Jesus onto us.

So the earlier reading in Psalm, it talks about because of our sin, we actually need to cry out to God to forgive. So God actually does forgive and take away our sins.

[14:20] But more than that, God chooses to put Jesus' righteousness onto us. So we can see this concept in Romans chapter 4. When Abraham believed in God, it was credited to him as righteousness.

So it's more than just forgiving our sins. God actually gives us Jesus' work, Jesus' good works onto us. So I want to use this analogy of the courthouse a bit further and think about what it means.

So imagine I was getting sentenced and somehow I received a letter in the mail. It says that my sentencing date is on Australia Day. That would be pretty weird to get a sentence on a public holiday but that's how it goes.

And on that day Jesus says I want to actually take your penalty. I will stand in your place and appear in front of the judge and I will take your punishment. And Jesus said actually I've double booked myself.

On that day I was actually due to be awarded the Australian of the Year Award for Outstanding Community Service. How about you go and take the award in my place.

[15:26] So that's sort of what God does for us in Jesus. He has taken the guilt. He stood before the judge taking away our guilt.

More than that God is putting all of Jesus' righteous works onto us. So when we appear before God God sees all of Jesus' good works instead of our sinful life.

So that's the amazing thing about justification. But we have to actually look at the second picture to work out how God can do that. So the second picture that we can see is from the word in verse 24 redemption.

So redemption Paul is trying to get us to think about the picture of a slave market in the first century. So we don't have slave markets nowadays which is quite good. But imagine 2,000 years ago at the slave markets.

If you are a slave back in the first century it means that you probably were born into slavery or somehow you incur some economic debt and you have to be sold into slavery.

[16:32] And you have no means of escaping slavery. Like if you have the money you would obviously buy your freedom. The way that God redeems is like him paying the price that is required to free a slave so that we can be free.

Another way of thinking of redemption is the idea of pawnbrokers. I'm sure most of you wouldn't have heard of what a pawnbroker is because we are way too young.

Nowadays we are out of money we just sell something on eBay or something. But 20 years ago or maybe in some country towns sorry that was bad but I've actually seen them in country towns so it's nothing against Nick or other people but it's actually easy.

If you run out of money what you do is take something precious like a guitar and you take it to the pawn shop, pawnbroker and you say I need some money so you take your guitar to the pawnbroker and you get some money and you want to redeem your guitar you have to make a bit more money than what they gave you and give it back to them and take your guitar back.

So that's how you redeem, you pay a price to take something back. This same idea is actually the idea in Exodus. God redeems the people for himself by paying a price.

[17:59] So these illustrations help us to understand the idea of redemption but we actually need to understand we are incapable of paying the redemption price. So that's why Paul brings in a third mental picture.

In verse 25 it talks about the sacrifice of atonement at the start of verse 25. So in other translations it can be translated as propitiation.

So these concepts mean God is turning away his propitiation means turning away of anger. So the picture Paul is trying to paint here is a picture of a temple.

So Jesus' sacrifice turns away God's anger. So we have heard Sam preach a couple of weeks ago about Christ alone and he went through the passage in Hebrews chapter 10.

So Hebrews chapter 10 is about Jesus' sacrifice, about the sacrificial system that's mentioned in Leviticus and how Jesus as a perfect sacrifice he paid for our sins once for all.

[19:08] So we put all these mental pictures together. We'll have enough answers to work out the questions I've been asking through the sermon which is how can a righteous God forgive and pardon an unrighteous person?

And how does Jesus' death make us right before God? So the way that we can work it out is to think about the three mental pictures again. So think of the temple.

Because Jesus is obedient to death and he's completely sinless. He's paid the price that is demanded for a sinner. The perfect righteous death.

Think of a slave market. Jesus' death is actually the ransom price that is required to free us from the bondage of sin and the penalty of sin.

And think about the law court. We can go free because Jesus, the innocent man, has stood in front of the judge so that we can be pardoned. And what's more, if you look at the end, chapter 3, verse 26, it's actually fair for God to pardon us when Jesus dies for us.

[20:22] Because God has already sent Jesus to die for us. So what that means is that he's not being unjust in forgiving us. So a lot of people will ask, why doesn't God just forgive us, just say, if you have sinned, just forget about it.

It's much better just to forget about sin than to actually have to punish someone. The reason is that God actually has to punish someone. He has set the price for sin.

Those that sin deserve to die. Therefore, Jesus needs to actually pay the price for sin. So when God pardons as a judge right now, he's being completely fair.

Someone has actually died for our sins. That person is Jesus. We have to ask the question, why would God do something like this? It's too wonderful and unimaginable.

We see the answer in verse 24. So we go back to verse 24. Verse 24 is we are justified freely by his grace. So we looked at grace alone last week.

[21 : 24] Grace is God's own initiative. It's a gift. We don't deserve grace. Grace is something that God does because he just wants to. So if you think about the concept of grace, even when we give gifts, it's actually usually due to a reason.

Yesterday I went to a birthday party for my daughter's friend. And they give gifts because it's someone's birthday. The week after, if you see them at school, I'm sure my daughter won't give that person another present.

The reason why we give is because something of that person is a birthday or because they're your children. We usually give gifts because of a reason. But God, the way he gives gifts, he gives it to us, we're totally undeserving.

So if we put, have you understood this passage, let's return to the topic sentence, which is justification by faith alone. So you might ask me, I've been talking about the whole passage, but I've never mentioned the word faith.

So why are you getting me to think about slave markets and pawnbrokers and the law court, and how come we have not talked about faith? The reason why we need to think is that faith needs an object.

[22 : 44] When we talk about justification by faith alone, it means, another word for faith is to believe, to rely, to trust, or to depend on something or someone.

depend. You can't say that I trust, I'm safe by depend. Who are you depending on? It means that we need to be absolutely clear on who we are depending on.

The reason why we are justified is not based on how much faith we have, but rather we need to realize completely that we need to depend on Jesus.

So what I want to do is to play a theoretical exercise, which the theoretical exercise is. What if we try to add to what Jesus has done? What would happen?

If we add our religious good works to what Jesus has done, what would happen? So let's think of the three mental pictures that Paul has presented in the book of Romans.

[23 : 42] If we actually try to add the works that we have done onto Jesus, it actually takes away from what God has done. Think of the temple. what God requires is a perfect sacrifice.

If we try to add our works on top, we actually spoil it because we are sinful. Not that we can do it, but if we try to do it, we actually make the sacrifice defiled.

Think of the slave market. God wants a perfect ransom to be paid. If we try to pay the ransom on top, we actually make it an imperfect ransom. Think of the law court.

If God requires an innocent person to stand before him, if we try to stand along with Jesus, I'm a guilty person. We can't add to it. All these examples are theoretical.

We can never put ourselves in Jesus' place because he's the only innocent one. He's the only guiltless one. He's the only perfect sacrifice that God will accept. This is the reason why we need to depend on Jesus completely.

[24 : 47] The more that we realise how wonderful Jesus' death is, and the more that we realise how undeserving we are, the more that we realise that we need to depend on Jesus completely.

So what does it mean for all of us? So if you've understood this passage for the first time, just like Luther did 500 years ago, you can actually see the excitement that Luther had.

And I will be excited if you understood this passage for the first time as well. So you can chat to one of us after the service, or if you want to, you can fill in the communication card to tell us how you've understood Jesus' righteousness for you, and we would love to hear about it.

So also the other thing that Sam's already mentioned is the piece of paper on your seat, which is the Investigating Christianity course. I would love for you to invite your friends and indeed your enemies to it, because everyone needs to hear the gospel.

And in fact, if you look at the outline, the fourth study is how to be right with God. And it will actually study this passage. The reason why we need to invite our friends is that we are desperate for the world to know Jesus and encounter Jesus.

[26 : 07] So I really hope that you can pray through this week who we can invite to this course. And the other thing is if you missed out on the training course I ran last week on how to lead this, and if you are keen to learn how to use these set of Bible studies to help your friends understand Jesus, I'd love to work alongside you and train you in this, so you can come along as well, and

hopefully we can do this on the job.

We'll learn to do this together, and we'll do this over the next five weeks. And lastly, even if you've heard this passage many, many times, I hope that the truth about Jesus here will help you grow in wonder, awe, and trust in Jesus and worship Jesus, so that we can know and treasure Jesus by completely relying on what Jesus has done on the cross for us.