

The Gospel Satisfies the Sinner's Need

Scripture: Romans 3:21-25

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Truth Matters 2011

Last night we looked at the glory of the gospel from the perspective of the apostle Paul, and we viewed his own life from the vantage point of one who grasped the glory of the gospel, and how it affected everything in his life. It affected his endurance. It allowed him to suffer. It caused him to be humble. It drove him to purity. All of those things we talked about. It made him a true and accurate handler of the Word of God, not adulterating the truth. All of those things. It drove him to be more concerned about eternal things, a great weight of glory, than about temporal comforts and temporal reputations. He understood the glory of the gospel. Its transcendence literally marked his entire perspective on life, and enabled him to go through life and suffer, really unimaginably and relentlessly, and ultimately end up as a martyr.

But what we didn't talk about last night was the essence of the gospel, the nature of the gospel, what is this glorious gospel? And that's our subject for this morning. And you can open your Bible to Romans, chapter 3 – Romans, chapter 3. Inevitably, if you're going to do any kind of a look at the gospel according to Paul, you're going to find yourself in the third chapter of Romans. And while there are so many aspects of the book of Romans that need to be understood, this particular portion is at the heart of it. Let me read you Romans chapter 3 verses 21 to 31. "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation" – or a satisfaction – "in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is He not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since indeed God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. Do we then nullify the Law through faith? May it never be! On the contrary, we establish the Law."

Now, this is going to be a little bit more like a classroom this morning. We're going to kind of work our way through this passage in two sessions. It breaks between verses 21 and 25a and 25b and verse

31, and it looks at the satisfying nature of the gospel. The gospel satisfies. The first half, how it satisfies the sinner and the situation the sinner is in; the second half, how it satisfies God. You might say that the first half is how Christ died for sinners; and the second half, how Christ died for God. Now, we all understand that Christ died for sinners, but maybe we aren't as familiar with the fact that Christ died for God. But that's what we're going to look at, that's what we're going to see in the second session this morning. The key word here is the word righteousness – the word righteousness, a form of the word dikaios, dikaios in the Greek, that is used many, many times in this portion of Scripture. Sometimes it appears as righteousness, sometimes it appears as justified, but it is the dominating word here.

And that opens for us the essence of the theme of the gospel. The gospel is about righteousness – it is about righteousness. And to begin to look at this passage, I want you to go back – all the way back to the book of Job – all the way back to the book of Job, which may be an account really of the earliest of all incidents in Holy Scripture after creation - Job chapter 9. This asks the essential question. Job chapter 9. “Then Job answered, ‘In truth I know that this is so,’” and here comes the question, “‘But how can a man be right before God?’” That is the all-prevailing question. How can a man be right before God? And he goes on to say, “If one wished to dispute with Him, he couldn't answer Him one in a thousand times. Wise in heart and mighty in strength, who has defied Him without harm? It is God who removes the mountains, they know not how, when He overturns them in His anger; who shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble; who commands the sun not to shine, and sets a seal upon the stars; who alone stretches out the heavens and tramples down the waves of the sea; who makes the Bear, Orion and the Pleiades, and the chambers of the south; who does great things, unfathomable, and wondrous works without number.

“Were He to pass by me, I would not see Him; were He to move past me, I would not perceive Him. Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him? Who could say to Him, ‘What are You doing?’ God will not turn back His anger; beneath Him crouch the helpers of Rahab. How then can I answer Him, and choose my words before Him? For though I were right, I could not answer; I would have to implore the mercy of my judge. If I called and He answered me, I could not believe that He was listening to my voice. For He bruises me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds without cause. He will not allow me to get my breath, but saturates me with bitterness. If it is a matter of power, behold, He is the strong one! And if it is a matter of justice, who can summon Him? Though I am righteous” – in a human sense – “my mouth will condemn me; though I am guiltless, He will declare me guilty.”

What a picture of God. Did you get that? What a massive identification of the greatness of God. And the question Job has is, “How can I be right with that God? How is it even possible that I could be right with that God, a God of such magnitude?” How is a man to be right with God? How is he to escape His inevitable judgment? Every religion in the world attempts to answer that question. Do you know that? Every religion in the world attempts to answer the question of how to be right with God. In Old Testament Israel, there were some religions that said you can be right with God if you take your

baby and incinerate your baby on an altar; and you'll get God off your back if you burn your children up. It's just an illustration of the nature of religion. But all religion follows one line; all religion, with the exception of the truth, follows one line. It is all a religious effort on the part of man to achieve a rightness with God. I call it the religion of human achievement, all of it. It doesn't matter what it is.

It doesn't matter whether it's the worship of Molech, which I was describing, the worship of Baal, the worship of Allah. It doesn't matter what it is. It doesn't matter if you're a Mormon, a Jehovah's Witness, a Roman Catholic; if you are a Shintoist, a Buddhist, a Hindu, it doesn't matter what it is. Or some minor religion unknown to most people, they are all the same. They are all purveyors of the big lie that you can make yourself right with whatever god you think exists by your own efforts. There's only one kind of false religion and that's it, it just comes under many, many labels. The suggestions are endless, but they all involve human effort and human achievement. Following certain behaviors morally, and certain behaviors ceremonially, and certain behaviors religiously, you can make yourself right with God.

Job didn't buy it. The Bible is clear that men cannot be right with God based on anything they achieve, based on anything they do. The question then comes, how can you be right with God? If you can't achieve it by morality, if you can't achieve it by ceremony, if you can achieve it by religious activity, how can you be right with God? That is the question; that is the ultimate and most important question that any human being will ever ask and have answered, because being right with God is the only way to escape eternal damnation in an everlasting hell. Now, up to this point in Romans – let's go back to Romans – up to this point in Romans, Paul has clearly shown in chapter 1, verse 18, right on to chapter 3, verse 20, where we picked up the reading in verse 21. Paul has shown that no one can be right with God on the basis of human effort, this great God so massively described by Job. In fact, Paul has made it unmistakably clear that there is, according to verse 10, "none righteous, no not one." None who seeks after God; they're all turned aside. There's none who does good. There's not even one. Paul has also made it clear that by the works of the Law, verse 20, no flesh will be justified, or made righteous in His sight.

So what happens in the opening three chapters of the book of Romans is the whole world is damned; the whole world is condemned. At the judgment bar of God, there is no man with an adequate defense. And this, of course, is particularly devastating to the religious man. And, of course, the world is full of religious people. Humanity is inveterately religious. But in this case, we'll take the Jews, because their religion is the issue that Paul addresses in the book of Romans. The Jews believed that they could be right with God by maintaining meticulously the Law of God revealed in the Old Testament, and extrapolating from that Law endless commands that they had come up with, that they believed created insulations around the Law, so that you never got close to violating the Law of God. They believed that you could become right with God by keeping the Law, obeying the Law.

Well, the Apostle Paul in these opening chapters has literally shredded that great error. It is not possible by keeping the Law to be justified. That was the conclusion in chapter 3 verse 20. The way of God is not by human effort. And this isn't the first time that revelation has declared this to be the case. If you go back to the sixth chapter of Micah, you read this, "Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil," things connected to sacrifice? "Shall I present my firstborn? Shall I give my child to be burned for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" Does it do any good to burn my baby? "He has told you, O man, what is good. What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, to love kindness, to walk humbly with your God." It's not about ceremony. It's not about ritual. It's about the heart. The problem is, what is the sinner going to do about his heart, which is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked? He cannot do justly, he cannot live kindly, he cannot please God. There is none right with God, no not one.

In fact, we learn in this portion of Romans that verse 19 says, "Every mouth is closed." In other words, there's no defense before the bar of judgment – before the judge himself, a living God – that can make us right with Him. There's no argument we can offer from the nature of our lives, from our morality, or our religion that will make us right with God. All sinners are both unable and unwilling. And even with the standards of religion laid before them in the Old Testament, the true standards of what pleases God, they cannot by means of obeying that, become right with God. If you break one of the laws, you've broken all of it, right? Even though the Law is the revelation and the reflection of the nature of God, and it is the standard of what is right, it is not attainable; so the plight of man is dark, it is dismal, and he is bound for hell without remedy. If Paul stopped in chapter 3, verse 20, the despair would be profound.

But suddenly we come to verse 21, where I began reading. When it appears, perhaps, that all hope is gone, and the religion of human effort has been utterly rejected, a light breaks through the darkness. "And now, apart from the Law, the righteousness of God has been manifest." The light breaks. It has flickered back in chapter 1, it flickered in chapter 1, verse 16. The gospel is the power of God for salvation. In the gospel, verse 17, "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." So in the introduction, Paul let the glory of the reality of salvation in the gospel flicker, and now the full light bursts in verse 21. Hope breaks through the sinner's horrendous despair. The opening words of verse 21, "But now," is a welcome transition. We've had enough of the ugliness of sin, chapter 1, verse 18, where the wrath of God is revealed from heaven. You know that well, don't you? The wrath of God is revealed from heaven, and that's not talking even about eschatological wrath, that's not even talking about eternal wrath, that's not talking about consequential wrath, whatever a man sows, he reaps. That's talking about the wrath of abandonment that cycles through human history, where God continually pours judgment on people after people after people, nation after nation after nation, because when they know God, they glorify Him not as God. They descend into sin, they create false gods. And He turns them over to immorality, homosexuality, and a reprobate mind. That's the cycle of human history. It's all about judgment on sin, individuals and collections of individuals, through history.

The dark of chapter 1:18 through 3:20 is thick and foreboding. But here is a welcome transition, the dawn of hope. "But now" – "but now, the righteousness of God has been manifested." The righteousness of God has been manifested. The righteousness of man? Inadequate, right? In fact, Isaiah said, "All our righteousness is as filthy rags" – filthy rags. Very graphic term in the Hebrew. A man can't be right with God by anything done on the human side. Let me show you something of the dilemma from a personal viewpoint in Paul's life. Turn to Philippians chapter 3 – we commented on this briefly last night, and you'll hear more about it even later today. Paul chronicles his own righteousness. He says, verse 4, "If anybody has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more." Okay, if you're going to stack up your own personal righteousness, how about this? "Circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin," one of the noblest of the tribes, "a Hebrew of Hebrews." That means a traditionalist. "As to the Law, a Pharisee." That means he was committed to the highest, most fastidious level of legal devotion. "As to zeal, a persecutor of the church," which he saw as an enemy of the truth, "and as to righteousness which is in the Law," he was "blameless." Externally, people couldn't lay any accusation on him that would stand. He was a very, very adept hypocrite, very polished, like so many others in the Pharisaic community.

And then he said, "These things were gain to me," verse 7. They were gain to me. I assumed they gained me salvation. But once I saw Christ, I realized they were loss. Everything went from the gain column to the loss column; verse 8, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord." That's what really matters. Why? Because of verse 9: "Because no longer do I have a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God." If you want to be right with God, you have to have a righteousness that comes from God. This is the essence of the gospel, folks. And we're going to be going around and around on this the next few days, so that you understand it and see it in its fullness. You can't be right with God based on human righteousness. The only way a man can be right with God is by the very righteousness of God. The light comes not from below, and not from within, but from above. This is God to the rescue.

If I'm going to be right with God, I have to be perfect, as my Father in heaven is perfect. That's not possible. I can't develop that level of righteousness. I can become a monk, I can contemplate my navel, as if that was a holy exercise, for the rest of my life. I could live in a monastery or a convent. I can wear nails in my shoes, and I can put a belt around my waist with barbs in the middle to scratch and cut my flesh. I can read Scripture and pray all day. I can hang from the ceiling with hooks. I can flagellate my flesh, I can crucify myself. It doesn't do any good. None of that has any value whatsoever, because the righteousness I need is divine. The only acceptable righteousness is God's own righteousness. The answer to the question, "What does a man need to be right with God?" is he needs the righteousness of God. This righteousness is different. It differs from any other righteousness. Isaiah 45:8 says, "Drop down, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness. Let the earth open and let righteousness spring up." What a beautiful picture.

The righteousness that we need has to come down from heaven. "Let the righteousness spring up." And then it says at the end of that verse, Isaiah 45:8, "I, the Lord, have created it." It is that righteousness of God, which is divine and perfect, which belongs to God Himself, created by God and manifest in Christ, which Peter calls "the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ." Folks, this is at the heart of the gospel. If you're to be right with God, you have to possess the righteousness of God. It is the righteousness of Yahweh. It is the righteousness of the Son of God. It is therefore distinguished from all other righteousness. It is a perfect righteousness. Jesus came into the world and He manifested that righteousness. He demonstrated that righteousness. In fact, theologians like to talk about the active righteousness of Christ and the passive righteousness of Christ. Have you heard those expressions? The active righteousness of Christ is that righteousness manifest in His living. The passive righteousness of Christ is that righteousness which was demonstrated in His dying.

Jesus shows us the righteousness of God by living a perfect life. He shows us the righteousness of God by dying a substitutionary death. We see the righteousness of God in display in His death. We see the righteousness of God in display in His life. He was perfectly obedient to the Law of God, fulfilling its precepts perfectly. And in His death, He perfectly fulfilled the required penalty of the Law for sin.

This is pictured, this perfection, this righteousness, in a pretty graphic way. If you turn to Leviticus, chapter 1, you will remember that in the book of Leviticus, the people of Israel were given sacrifices that they had to offer, and there were three of them in particular that related to sin: the trespass offering, the guilt offering and then the burnt offering.

Well, if you begin in chapter 1 of Leviticus, you're introduced immediately to the burnt offering. The burnt offering is the most general of all sacrifices. It was the sweet-smelling savor. It shared some of the same elements and features of the trespass offering and the guilt offering, but it also had one that was unique, and I'll talk about that in a moment. But the burnt offerings symbolized the essential features of atonement – the essential features of atonement. The Lord was saying to the people of Israel way back then that human righteousness isn't enough. And it was demonstrated symbolically in particular in this sacrifice. "The Lord called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, "When any man of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of animals from the herd or the flock."'" Okay? And then it begins to be defined. The first thing that had to be true about the offering was that it was a male without blemish. Verse 3: "If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without blemish" – or without defect – without defect. Verse 10, his offering, "if it's from the flock, of the sheep or of the goats, for a burnt offering, he shall offer it a male without defect."

What is this saying? That the sacrifice that God requires has to be pure, perfect, sinless, blameless. The offender is guilty; the atonement comes from one who is innocent. What a wonderful picture, because no animal is guilty of sin. No sheep was guilty of sin. No ram was guilty of sin. No bull was guilty of sin. No goat was guilty of sin. And so here is the picture of a sacrifice that is required for the guilty sinner, a sacrifice that is without sin. That's why Peter says that we have literally had a provision, a sacrifice, a substitute who is without blemish. "We have been redeemed not by silver and gold, but with the precious blood of the Lamb without blemish." The lamb without blemish – stop there for a minute – points to, I believe, the active obedience of Christ. The lamb without blemish points to the active obedience of Christ. Some people say, "Well the active obedience issue is not in the Bible." I think it is in Scripture; I think it's right here certainly, and other places. The active obedience of Christ, which provided a sacrifice demonstrably perfect, so that all could know that sacrifice was acceptable.

When God said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," when the writer of Hebrews said of Jesus, "He's holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners," testimony could be verified as to His perfection because of the life He lived without sin, right? The lamb without blemish points to an active obedience of Christ, which provided for God a perfection of sinless, holy, righteous life, demonstrated to everybody so it could be seen. When you brought your lamb, it was checked to make sure it was without blemish. So the first requirement was to symbolize the necessity of a perfect sacrifice, a male animal without blemish.

The second aspect of the burnt offering, very interesting, the offender leaned all his weight on the animal. Verse 4: "He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf." Literally, what folks did, as we know from history, is they would come up to the sacrifice, and they would put hands on the head of that sacrifice, symbolically leaning on that sacrifice with full weight, symbol of transferring guilt to the substitute. This is the nature of faith. It rests its trust and its salvation hopes fully on the substitute. Beautiful, beautiful picture of faith in Christ, where we lay all our trust on the One who dies in our place. Another element of the burnt offering in verse 5 was very interesting. The offerer, the sinner making the offering, "he shall slay the young bull before the Lord." The death of the substitute symbolized the horrendous, fatal penalty for sin; it demonstrated that divine justice was absolute and severe, and required death. And it was personalized, because the offender had to actually kill the animal, very personal. Some people would like us to think that salvation is some kind of collective thing. That's the new perspective on Paul. This sacrifice indicates that it's very, very personal. The sinner killed the animal with his own hands, making a vivid personal impression of his own responsibility for the death of the final substitute. Your sins put Christ there.

The next feature is that the priest splattered the blood on the altar. The middle of verse 5, "The priest shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of the meeting." This symbolizes the fact that the penalty for sin was death, and that only death,

symbolized by blood, could satisfy God.

And then finally, a fifth component of this; the first four are the same in the guilt and trespass offering. This is unique. The priests burn the entire sacrifice – all of it. Verse 6: “You shall then skin the burnt offering and cut it into its pieces. The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire,” and so forth. Down in verse 9, “Its entrails, however, its legs shall he wash with water. The priest shall offer up in smoke all of it on the altar for a burnt offering, an offering by fire of a soothing aroma to God.” This is the burnt offering that is a sweet aroma in the nostrils of God. What does this symbolize? That God is pleased with the sacrifice, His wrath is placated, and peace and reconciliation has come. Like Isaiah 53:10, “it pleased the Lord to crush him.” It pleased the Lord to crush him.

This is an illustration of the righteousness that God requires. He requires a righteous sacrifice, a perfectly righteous sacrifice, symbolized in the burnt offering, symbolized in the sacrificial system, realized in the person of Jesus Christ, who lived a life of perfect obedience, therefore actively demonstrating the righteousness of God, who died a death of perfect obedience, demonstrating at that point as well the perfect fulfillment of the penalty of the Law on behalf of sinners. We don't have the righteousness that God requires. He has to give it to us. And He does that in the sacrifice of Christ. Something else to be said about – go back to Romans, by the way – something else to be said about this righteousness of God that we're talking about here, is that it is an everlasting righteousness. Isaiah says, “My righteousness shall be forever” – forever. If we could muster up a moment's righteousness, it wouldn't last, right? It wouldn't last. That's why Hebrews 10:14 says, “We have been perfected forever by the sanctifying offering of Christ.” “Who has purchased for us,” Hebrews 9:12 says, “eternal redemption.” We don't need to try to hold on to righteousness. We don't need to hold on to it, because it's not a righteousness that we can achieve, and it's not a righteousness that we can maintain. It's the righteousness of God which comes down. That's why salvation is forever.

People say, “Well, you can lose your salvation.” How can you lose your salvation? You could only lose your salvation if your salvation depended on you. By the way, if I could lose my salvation, I would. I promise you. So would you. If it could be done, it would be done. I can't maintain my salvation, because what maintains my salvation is a righteousness of God, completely alien to me, granted to me. So the key in this passage, then, is this concept of righteousness – back to Romans, chapter 3. We need a righteousness, the righteousness of God – all that's just kind of introducing you to this section. All right, let's break it down now. I think we have about a half an hour. No? Maybe not. Oh well. Most of my messages are like linked sausage, you can whack it off anywhere and get the whole piece, you know, so. Let's just talk about some of the components then of this righteousness of God.

Number one: it's apart from legalism – it's apart from legalism. I'll give you a handful of points. It's apart from legalism – verse 21: “apart from the law,” apart from the law. It is in the emphatic position. I don't know where it fits in to your translation, but the NAS has it right. It is in the emphatic position in the Greek. “But now apart from the Law,” that's the emphatic statement. The righteousness has nothing to do with keeping the Law. We've learned that, haven't we? It is a righteousness that cannot be achieved. Chapter 5, verse 20 says, “The Law came so that the transgression would increase.” The Law, rather than having the effect of producing righteousness, produces – what – transgression. Paul says, “I saw the Law of God, sin revived, and I died” – Romans 7. The Law isn't going to do it. The Law is not going to achieve righteousness. So the righteousness of God emphatically is apart from the Law. What that means is, law-keeping. The believer must understand that. The greatest error of religion is that people can achieve righteousness, a right standing with God by works. That's the devil's big lie.

It is not only apart from Law, but let me give you a second truth, it is based on revelation – based on revelation. “Being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,” a euphemism for the Old Testament; this isn't anything new. This isn't anything new; this is what the Old Testament has always said. Go down to chapter 4, verse 3, for example, “For what does the Scripture say?” Here's the model, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” So Abraham was saved by – what – faith. That's the whole point of chapter 4. Verse 2: “If Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about, but not before God.” Verse 5: “To the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness” – now we realize this is not new; this is right out of the Old Testament.

Verse 9: “Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness.” That's right out of Genesis 15. The ceremonies and the rituals, religious activities, of the Old Testament, couldn't give life. Even the Law of God, the holy Law of God, which Paul says is holy, just and good, couldn't give life. They could only produce death. This is not new. Go all the way back to Genesis, the very beginning. And what did the prophets say? How about Habakkuk, “The just shall live by his faith.” It's always been that way, always. Isaiah, that wonderful 55th chapter of Isaiah, needs to be brought in at this point. “O everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat” – in other words, you who have no righteousness. “Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” Verse 6: “Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and he will have compassion on him, and to our God” – and here's the key – “for He will abundantly” – what – “pardon.” You need pardon.

But what did the Old Testament Law intend to do? To drive people to despair over their inability to do anything about their sin, and therefore have them cry out to God for mercy. The best illustration of an Old Testament conversion that I know is Luke 18, “the publican bowed down, won't even lift up his eyes toward heaven, pounding his chest, saying, ‘Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.’ That man went

home justified.” That’s a beatitude attitude. The indictment of the Pharisees that comes at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount is “you’ve got it all wrong.” Who has the Kingdom? Those who are spiritually bankrupt and know it, poor in spirit. Those who are meek. Those who hunger and thirst after a righteousness they know they don’t have, those who weep and mourn over their spiritual condition, they’re the ones comforted, they’re the ones that receive the Kingdom. This has always been the way in Scripture. It’s not a different way to be saved in the Old Testament, it’s always been the same. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a subversion of the Old Testament. It’s not a transition into a new way of salvation. It is the full substance of what was a shadow in the Old Testament, but one that was discernable.

Thirdly, when we talk about the righteousness of God, it is apart from legalism, it is based on revelation, it is acquired by faith – acquired by faith, verse 22: “Even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ.” Through faith, and here we’ve already noted that; that salvation comes by faith. Back again to Romans 4:5: “He justifies the ungodly because his faith is credited as righteousness. Boy, that is an amazing and magnanimous gift, isn’t it? “For by grace are you saved through faith” – Ephesians 2:8 and 9 – “that not of yourselves, even that is a gift of God.” It’s simply by believing – by believing. Over in verse 20 of chapter 4 – again, we’re still talking about Abraham – verse 20 says, “With respect to the promise of God, He didn’t waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, being fully assured that what God had promised He was able to perform. Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness.” Do you understand this exchange? You give to God faith, He gives you His righteousness. That’s why we say salvation is by faith alone, sola fide – faith alone, by believing. And even that believing is a gift of God.

Now, just a few other points to make here. We could talk a lot about what the nature of saving faith is, but we’ll probably cover that in one of our subsequent sessions. So let’s just go to a fourth point. The righteousness of God comes to us down from heaven – this is Paul’s gospel, this is the heart of it – apart from legalism, based on revelation, consistent with the Old Testament, acquired by faith, a faith which God Himself grants, not apart from our will, but by moving on our will moving on our will and giving life to our dead souls by the ministry of regeneration conducted by the Holy Spirit. Fourthly, the righteousness of God is provided for all who believe. This goes against the grain of Pharisaic Judaism for sure. If you want to know how the Jews felt about Gentile conversion, read the book of Jonah. Jonah was supposed to be a prophet. He was supposed to be an evangelist. He was supposed to be a missionary. And the worst thing that ever happened to Jonah was people got converted and made him furious. He wanted God to kill him. He was so mad that the Ninevites believed and the Gentiles were going to horn in on Jewish promise. What a strange twist. So verse 22 says, “The righteousness of God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ” – he’s the object of the faith – “comes for all those who believe, for there is no distinction.” All who believe. Again, I say, the Jews hated this. Acts 13:39 says, “All who believe are justified” – justified – “there’s no difference.” The same gospel preached to the Jew and the Gentile. You say, “What about earlier in Romans 1, to the Jew first, and also the Greek?” That’s chronology. Obviously, God sent His Son into the nation Israel as a Jew, and the

gospel message came first to the Jews chronologically, but it was always intended for the world – always – always. And the proof of this is in verse 23. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” The reason it’s available to all is because all have the same need. All have the same need.

In fact, if you go back for just a little bit into Romans 2 and 3, you can see that the Jews who prided themselves on what they had are condemned. Verse 25, “For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law. If you’re a transgressor of the Law, your circumcision has become uncircumcision. If the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?” In other words, it’s about keeping the Law. That’s the issue. And neither the circumcised nor the uncircumcised can do that. “You boast about the Law,” he says in verse 23, “and you break the Law and dishonor God. And the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” You’re no better off than the Gentiles. When John the Baptist came along and was baptizing people, do you know what that baptism was? That wasn’t Christian baptism; that was Jewish proselyte baptism. That was Jewish proselyte baptism. That’s a baptism that they did to Gentiles who wanted to become a part of the Jewish religion. And here is John the Baptist baptizing the population of Israel, the Jewish people, and by baptizing them, he is saying “you are no better off than Gentiles.” That was a bitter pill for people to swallow. He was giving to the Jews a proselyte baptism, because in reality they were outside the covenant of God, even though they as a people had received His promises.

There’s no difference. The same gospel. Some people think that Jews had a gospel of Law in the Old Testament, and the Gentiles a gospel of grace. That’s not true. Only one gospel, only one way of salvation. It’s always been the same. Always been by faith. No difference, Jew or Gentile, because everybody’s got the same need. “All have sinned and all fall short of God’s glory.” All come short of God’s glory - what does that mean? Well, Isaiah 43:7 says, “I’ve created him for My glory, but he has failed to bring Me glory.” Sin puts all people in the same situation. They all need the righteousness of God. That righteousness of God has always been available to anyone who believes. There’s no difference – no difference.

So being right with God is apart from legalism, built on revelation, acquired by faith, provided for all. Number five, given through grace – given through grace. Verse 24: “Being justified as a gift by His grace.” We know that, don’t we? Being justified as a gift by His grace. So you don’t earn it, it’s a gift, right? We’ve said that all our lives as Christians, haven’t we? It’s a gift. You can reject it or you can receive it, you can’t earn it. It’s a gift. I love that. The Authorized says, “Freely by His grace.” The NAS have actually more accurately translated the Greek; it is as a gift by His grace that we have become justified. Justified means righteous. Same word, dikaios, it’s a matter of grace. Paul uses the term charis, grace, about a hundred times in his letters, because the gospel, as we know, is always to be understood as a gospel of grace.

Being right with God, then, is given through grace. But even though it is free to us, it was very costly, and that's the sixth point, it was accomplished by redemption – accomplished by redemption, verse 24: “through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” What is the redemption – what does the word redemption mean? It means to ransom someone by the payment of a price – to ransom someone by the payment of a price. Who paid the price? Jesus did. And what was the price? “God displayed publicly” – verse 25 – “Christ Jesus as a satisfaction of propitiation,” a hilastion, “a covering in His blood through faith.”

“How can a man be right with God,” Job said, “with such a God as this?” How can a man be right with God? Not on his own, not by his own efforts; he must receive from heaven the righteousness of God as a gift, apart from legalism, based clearly on the revelation of God in the Old Testament, acquired by faith, available to all who believe, given by grace, accomplished by redemption through an atoning sacrifice. This is Paul's gospel, insofar as it satisfies the sinner's need. That's why we preach this message. It's a single message. No gospel, no salvation. I know there are people who say today, “Oh, they don't have to hear the gospel in places where they have not had an opportunity, God will account whatever faith they have in whatever they know as adequate to save them.” That is not what the Bible says. It's by faith in Christ, and apart from Him there is no salvation; thus the mandate to go to the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

So the great question in the heart of the sinner, how can a man be right with God? The answer comes here by the righteousness of God granted to him by faith through grace, based upon the fact that Christ has paid for all his sins, and by that payment, paid the price in full to ransom the sinner. We're going to see more about that. Father, we thank You for the time this morning to dig down, move deeply into this wonderful portion of Scripture. Your Word always, always feeds our souls and encourages us. I pray, Lord, that the clear truth of this text would come home to all of us, and enable us not only to rejoice and to worship You more freely and more knowingly, to worship in spirit and in truth, but that it might make us more faithful evangelists with a better understanding of the message that we proclaim to sinners everywhere. Continue to do Your work through both the teaching of the Word today and our wonderful time together in fellowship, and we'll thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

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