

We Need A Righteousness from God

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[0 : 00] And we're going to this morning, we're actually, for those of you who haven't been at the previous times that I've shared and preached, you're jumping into sermon number three out of five.

And what we've done so far is we kind of looked at the centrality of the gospel, the good news about Jesus, and then we talked about the bad news. We're going to kind of look back at that a minute.

And now we're getting into the real meat of the gospel. The meat of what it means to have the good news of Jesus. That we're going to begin to unpack the biblical definition this morning and then both Sunday morning and Sunday evening as a plug for those services next week.

That we look at the gospel and the question that I want you to be considering, whether you're coming here as a person of faith, as a person who has faith in Jesus Christ, or someone who comes quite skeptical and unknowing and doubting and frustrated.

I want you to be considering the question, what is so good about the good news of Jesus according to the Bible? What is so good about the good news of Jesus?

[1 : 14] And what we're going to be looking at this morning is the promise that there is a promise of restoration between us and God. What we looked at a couple of weeks ago was the idea that there had been a rebellion in separation.

There is bad news that is kind of a precursor to the good news of the gospel. And that bad news begins with our turning from God.

And so the good news of the gospel, as we're going to look at it today, is about first that restoration between us and God. It doesn't stop there. And by the way, I think that some of us as Christians kind of stop the gospel right there.

And then the next two times that we look at the doctrines of sanctification and glorification, big words, that we are going to kind of push beyond this idea of the gospel is just about me and God.

But it is actually about me and God, me and myself, me and all of you and people around me and me in the world. What I want you to see out of this time in the gospel together is that the gospel according to the Bible is huge.

[2 : 35] It is good news not just for your soul, but it is good news for every molecule in the universe. It is a big view of God's grace.

The gospel compels us to have a big view of the good news. And so today we're going to look at the doctrine of justification.

That's a big theological word. Don't be intimidated by it. But it's not just a churchy word. If you're around Christians very often, you kind of hear people kind of throw around kind of phrases.

And maybe you've been a Christian for a while and you still don't understand some of those phrases. And frankly, I don't understand some of the phrases we throw around sometimes. But the word justification is an important word because it's a Bible word.

So there is a sense in which we need to allow our vocabulary to broaden in order to understand the various nuances of the good news of what it means to be saved.

[3 : 39] Because I know we're comfortable with the phrase kind of, have you been saved? Yes, I've been saved. Well, what do you save from? I don't really know. What do you save too? I'm not sure.

What we're going to do is kind of unpack really that idea of what does it mean to be saved? That's what the gospel is really talking about. And today we're talking about the idea of justification.

And justification is the doctrine of God declaring us forgiven and righteous in Jesus alone.

Let's look at this passage together. And really as we look at this passage and the various passages we'll be covering in Romans for the coming weeks, the question I want you to have in mind is, is my view of the gospel big enough?

Do I have the Bible's understanding of what the good news really is? Reading from verse 21, just to verse 26.

[4 : 44] This is God's word. But now a righteousness from God apart from the law has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There's no difference for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice because in His forbearance He had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.

And He did it to demonstrate His justice at the present time so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Let me pray. Father, thank you for this word. And we ask that you would give us the eyes to see and the ears to hear. That for those of us who are Christians here, Lord, that you would expand our view of the good news.

[6 : 04] That we might rejoice in the joy that it brings to us and extend it to others. And for those of us here, Lord, who are not Christians, I pray, Lord, that you would lovingly confront and challenge what we hold on to when we do not hold on to Jesus and show us the goodness of resting by faith in Jesus alone.

Bless us, we pray, as we endeavor to look at these words in Jesus' name. Amen. Paul starts this section. And like I told you, you're kind of jumping into talk number three out of five.

He starts this section but now. Now, when we look at that, we obviously need to see the contrast and we need to ask kind of what comes before this.

But I want you to understand whenever you read Scripture, you need to read the Bible with those important little buts. And however's and therefore's.

That you need to pay attention to the shifts and turns. We don't read Scripture just kind of flatly or kind of as we kind of skim over the newspaper for, you know, the latest scores on, you know, the football tournament or something like that.

[7 : 27] That we read and we allow ourselves to get into and kind of experience the drama of Scripture. And Paul has built this entire case before.

The reason that he has the but now before you is that he has gone through and previously talked about the bad news.

He's talked to those of us who are not Christians. He's talked to those of us who come from unbelieving backgrounds. And he has kind of said in Romans one in particular in Romans two, he said, the things that you're searching after God has declared to you that he is the one that you should hope in.

And all those other things in which you seek to find significance in the foundations you try to lay for your family and for your business and for what is success in life.

Or ultimately a house of cards if they are not built on Jesus. And to the Christian, to the religious, he doesn't leave us out to the churchgoer.

[8 : 38] He says the same thing. He says the bad news is that so many of you, so many of us who go to church and are, you know, kind of religious folks.

We also rest on the faulty foundation. The faulty foundation sometimes of mere religion. A faulty foundation that will not hold up.

A foundation of morality. A foundation of responsibility. Of service. Of all these good works. And he says your good works cannot support you.

But now. So he challenges both the self-righteous and even the self-loathing is what he's going to get into here in a little bit.

And he's going to challenge the self-righteous to look in the mirror. Both the self-righteous who are religious and irreligious. He's going to say look in the mirror, look closely.

[9 : 38] You know when you pass by a mirror sometimes and you kind of look real fast at a glance and you go, man, I look good. Right? And then you kind of walk into the other room and your significant other, you know, your wife or husband, your boyfriend, girlfriend, friend, whatever.

And he looks at you and goes, hmm, probably need to go back in, wipe your face off. And you go, what? And you look back in the mirror and you kind of do a more extended glance in the mirror and you realize you've got kind of this smudge up here and a little bit of lunch left over.

Some spinach in your tea. What Paul is saying here is he's saying the but now is confronting us. Those self-righteous among us need to look a little bit more closer in the mirror because you're not that pretty.

But he's also confronting those of us who are kind of those ascetics that whip ourselves, beat ourselves up.

Oh, we're humble. I would never love someone so sinful like me. The self-loathing is also unbelief in the face of a but now.

[10 : 59] Paul is saying both to the self-righteous and to the self-loathing but now a righteousness of God is being made known, is being revealed.

Pay attention to the but now. And what he says in this is that God is restores what we fractured.

You see what he says in verse 21 when he says, but now a righteousness from God apart from the law has been revealed. Up until this point, all Paul has done is describe life apart from Jesus really is death.

And by the way, when you hear, if you're not a Christian and you hear Christians talk about sin and death and you kind of go, come on man, you're blowing that out of proportion. We are not saying, and the Bible is not saying, that we fully experienced the death and separation and fracture that life apart from Jesus brings immediately.

But we looked at the other day a few weeks ago, there is a trajectory towards brokenness. I don't know about you. Occasionally I go to the chiropractor, not for any weird kind of, some chiropractors kind of into weird stuff, you know like middle, you know, new agey kind of stuff.

[12 : 27] I go simply because my back hurts. But whenever I go to the chiropractor, what he does is he lays me out on the table and he starts messing with my heels and my legs.

And then he gets to my back and my neck. And what he begins to talk to me about is, you know, your legs are off. This leg is longer than this one because I've got kind of out of whack somewhere.

And because that leg is longer, I've got kind of a knee issue. And then I've got a hip issue over here and a lower back pain. Then my neck gets out of sorts. And so when, what he does is he's saying, yeah, because you, yeah, you're feeling the pain here, but you've got problems all through this thing.

And what Paul is doing is he's saying when he's confronting us with the righteousness that God has given, and he talks first about the bad news, he's not saying it's as bad as it could be because some of us feel pain over here or some of us feel over here.

Some of us are lonely over here. Some of us are angry over there. Some of us feel insecurity. Some of us are prideful. But those little things that are out of whack are really the story of a great fracture in your life.

[13 : 50] And the Gospel, the but now of the righteousness of God confronts those things and says, I know you're a broken person. I know you're not that beautiful.

But I have given a righteousness to you through my Son Jesus. It's not of yourselves that I am in fact going to deal with your fractured soul.

And when he talks about the righteousness of God, we're going to talk about why that doesn't, you know, sometimes we talk in terms of kind of the religious words again. And we look at words like righteousness from God.

And those are not categories we usually talk about in our society today. And so they kind of sound kind of aloof. They kind of sound esoteric, you know, like the righteousness of God sounds like something we should bow to and, you know, kind of memorize, but really doesn't have any bearing on your life.

And what what's happening here is Paul is saying, you are unrighteous, all of you and me. But now I'm going to provide a righteousness for you.

[15 : 02] Apart from me, you are fractured. You're out of whack. You may feel it here or there, but I can see the whole thing.

And I'm going to provide you a righteousness that is not in and of yourselves that is apart from you. And it is going to restore my relationship with you and brothers and sisters.

The mission about which Derek and Tom and Neil and others talk to you about what Dan's been reiterating as he's been here can only happen.

We can only be effective to reaching the world, to loving our neighbor, to dealing with the internal stuff we've all got going on.

If we first get that point that God has provided a righteousness apart from you that restores your relationship with him.

[16 : 05] You see, this all went out of whack through our rebellion and turning away from him. So in our rebellion from him, not only did we kind of mess up and separate ourselves from God, we separated ourselves from ourselves, from others and from the world.

If you remember back in Genesis 3, all things were wonderful in Genesis 1 and 2. All things were delightful. You know, the man and the woman they stood before each other, they were naked and unashamed.

They were thrilled to be in relationship with one another. They walked with God in the cool of the day. Their world around them was lush and bountiful.

And when they out of unbelief and rebellion turned from God, it didn't just separate them from God. Shame entered the picture.

Fear overtook them. A competitive nature. It's her fault, not mine. It's not my fault, it's him.

[17 : 16] It overtook them. It overtook and destroyed their relationships with one another. And it cast them out of that lush and beautiful place into a place of thorns and toil.

What we're going to see as we look over the next few weeks is the gospel preached to all of that that's broken. God's goal is to restore all of that.

But we need to make sure we get this point first. If you don't restore your relationship with God, if you don't by faith look for the righteousness God provided.

And you try in and of yourselves whether through religion or irreligion to provide a righteousness of your own. None of the other things that are corrupted and fractured in your life will ever be mended properly.

I'll still have that fear. I won't have peace. I'll still be afraid of what you're going to do to me. I will try to puff myself up so that I am better than you and I will do it by stepping on your back.

[18 : 23] I will not bring peace to this world because I don't have peace in here. We will not be a light to Edinburgh because we don't actually extend the light of the gospel to each other.

So I want you to understand the gospel as we look at it especially the next two weeks is bigger than the restoration of our relationship with God but it must begin there.

It's not a neat little add-on at the end. Hey, I'm an otherwise a pretty moral person and well you know what? I'll just glue Jesus onto the side of me.

No. Right? You know, some of you drive quite crummy cars. You know, the sea mist is corroding them.

There are little rust spots all throughout. You know, you sit there and you kind of pray before you start that it'll actually turn over.

[19 : 25] You know, your friends hate for you to be, you know, kind of go out because they know you're going to call them to come pick you up because your car won't start. Well, if you take that ugly beat-up old machine rust bucket and you slap a new Mercedes sign on the top of it, it's still a rust bucket.

You can't simply try to slap on Jesus to the outside of something that is otherwise ugly. It must begin with him from the very beginning and he tells us that he renovates us.

He restores our lives, those rust buckets from the inside out. And that's what's promised here, that there is a righteousness of God promised by faith.

And look what he says here. He wants you to keep, we reiterated this point a few weeks ago, but he wants you to keep the gospel central. He even says this, that the righteousness of God is apart from the law but has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify.

By the way, the law and the prophets, especially as they are in your text, they're capitalized, is shorthand for the Old Testament.

[20 : 52] Do you see the point? Paul's saying, hey, the button now is breaking in, but it's always been that way. The gospel has always been center, front and center in what I'm doing in this world.

And he reiterates the centrality of the gospel again because he did that in chapter one because we're oftentimes distracted.

We oftentimes are kind of like children on Christmas morning, we children in particular, very small children. You ever had that experience as a parent or a grandparent or a niece or an uncle or whatever?

It's experience of watching young children open up presents and you have poured out this great expense. You as a parent can't wait for the child to open it.

You know, it's one of those big box presents. It's grand, it's the dollhouse that you thought your daughter always wanted. It's the tricycle that your son is just going to get hours and hours of play on.

[22 : 03] And he opens up the box and he's so excited for just a moment and then he puts the tricycle aside. She pushes the dollhouse aside and she starts playing in the box.

Kids love boxes. Why am I not clever enough just to buy boxes? Instead of pour out my hard-earned money for all the stuff inside the box that they could care less about because they just want to make something out of the box.

But you see, as Christians we're oftentimes like those children because Christ has given us something of substance.

He said this whole thing, all of this is about the gospel. It's always been about the gospel, there's nothing else that it is about. It is front and central and all of you, what you read here, you ought to read it through the lens of the gospel.

But you know what we do? We tear this thing apart oftentimes and ignore the gospel all together and just fixate on all the other bits.

[23 : 12] That it was never intended to fixate on. We become fascinated with doing this writer, that writer, is that honorable, is that reverent enough?

Should we sing this or not sing that? It's about the gospel. It's always been about the gospel.

And if we as a church are to be about the business of Jesus, it will continue to be about the gospel.

Keeping the gospel central means keeping Jesus central, and that's what Paul does here, is he reiterates he reiterates that the gospel is principally a promise of what Jesus has done for us, not what we do for him.

Do you get that? It's a righteousness from God. The grace of the gospel is not a we help.

[24 : 19] The grace of the gospel is not kind of God kind of propping up our otherwise healthy efforts with a little push.

The gospel tells us that Jesus' grace is not a vitamin or a vitamin. It is life support.

You never move beyond the grace of the gospel. Look at what he says, verse 21. It's been made known and otherwise it's been revealed to you because there'd be, if we're preposterous for us to think of this by our own.

All of us, we could sit here all day long and just hash out the volumes of how we are unworthy of the righteousness of God.

But it's been revealed that he's giving it to you by his grace. It's the gospel. It's about what he has done, not what we have done.

[25 : 24] Verse 22. It is through faith and otherwise faith by the way is not just kind of believing haphazardly in what you wish for. You know, I really have faith that when I walk out of here, some guy will drive up with a Lamborghini and say, here's the keys.

That ain't happening. That's not biblical faith. Biblical faith is resting in something and all of us do it. We're all, whether we're religious or irreligious, are resting and finding our identity in something.

And faith in Jesus Christ is what the gospel says is the only firm foundation. And for those of you who are not Christians and doubt that, my invitation to you is to come and test drive.

Come and try on the gospel. Come and evaluate the good news of Jesus. Faith in him, all other grounds are sinking sand.

Verse 24 says it quite straightforwardly. It is by his grace. Otherwise, it is not you. It's not me.

[26 : 41] Before the throne of God above, I have one plea and it's not, look, I'm a great dude. It is Jesus is my plea.

It's all I got. That's all you got. It's Jesus plus nothing. Not Jesus plus your attendance at church.

Not Jesus plus your discipleship program. Not Jesus plus I've always been here and I'm staying here till I die. It's Jesus plus nothing.

That's good news because all we offer is bad news. All we got is fracture and as we depend on him only by his grace, we have a promise of righteousness.

I hope that resonates with us. I hope the positive nature of the gospel resonates with you because I think sometimes what we do, even with the doctrine of justification, it's clearly about the righteousness of God.

[27 : 55] We make it kind of this wishful hope by faith. I hope God is a nice guy and will accept another nice guy like me.

I'm not perfect. That's not what the gospel says. As we look next week, we're going to talk about our sin again as we talk about sanctification because we still live even as Christians struggling with sin.

You're not beautiful. You're not nice guys. You're not good girls. But God by his grace makes you righteous in him.

That's the gospel. Jesus plus nothing. And where Paul goes to kind of ground all of this is something to be honest a bit offensive, maybe at the first, verse 25.

The reason we have a hope of righteousness, the reason we can trust in Jesus is this, that God has presented him as a sacrifice of atonement.

[29 : 03] Again, another religious word that kind of scares us. If you read in other translations, bigger word, propitiation.

That Jesus dies that you might live. That messes with us. God is angry at sin.

He hates what sin is doing to what he created to be good and whole. He hates the fracture. And God's hatred of sin is not in conflict with his love.

Just as my father and mother both have had cancer in the last three years and I hate cancer because I love my parents.

God hates sin and the people who are instruments of undermining the wholeness of his creation because he loves what he has made.

[30 : 15] And so God provides an atonement, a propitiation, a satisfaction that we do not provide for ourselves.

And I think that this is offensive for some of us because we work on the good guy, bad guy scenario that we're better than 51% and therefore we don't need Jesus to die for us.

That is seriously. Jesus, you can give me a help out. You can buy me a sandwich. You know, you can give me kind of the warm feeling that I desire when I'm all alone.

You can kind of comfort me when I'm fearful. But don't tell me you have to die for me. Right? That's what Peter said. Peter said, you're the Christ. And Jesus says, you know what that means, right?

I got to die for you. And he goes, whoa, dude, step back. And Jesus says, you got it all wrong. If you want the grace of the gospel, you must have me die for you.

- [31 : 14] And he challenges our sensibilities that we're fine. Right? You know, we're in a customary culture. We walk past people, you know, down the lane and we go, how you doing?
- Fine. How are you doing? Good. Okay. That one's fine. Unless you mean fine, like freaked out, insecure, neurotic and emotional, right? We're fine.
- We are fine that way. But not fine in the sense of okay. And the fact that Jesus says, you need me to die for you, you're not fine.
- You're fine. Confronts that sensibility and that desire to trust in ourselves.
- We're still good guys. We're still good girls. Look at how I contribute. No. No. Jesus plus nothing is what the gospel is saying.
- [32 : 15] And what this does in a way is it frees us to be honest with our sin. It frees us from desiring to mask ourselves with the self righteousness.
- And I ask you, those of you who are members of Saint Seas, those of our friends who come in and visit our church, do they see that? Do they see like, man, these people are messed up, but they got Jesus.
- These people are not perfect. These people are blowing my paradigms of what good free church folks look like. But wow, they are holding on to the grace of God like nobody have ever seen.
- And I am attracted to it. If they're that screwed up, then they can accept me, the one who is also a screwed up as they are.
- We're not fine. We're not okay. We're not okay. We need Jesus to die for us. It also confronts our sense of justice.
- [33 : 25] We have such a political politicized, biased view of justice. We're skeptical of all other authorities. And Jesus says, I am look at verse 26.
- I am the just one and I also justify. Through my death, I free you from fear of judgment.
- You see, without a biblical concept of justice, we just kind of eat each other alive. All it is is a will to power. All it is is me trying to impose on you the sense of what I think is right.
- Even when it's not right. You see that in children too, right? You know, that you say to a child who wants to just eat sweets all day long and you know that they need more nourishment than just sweets.
- And you say, okay, all right, that's it, no more sweets. What's the words that come out of their mouth? That's not fair. What are you talking about?
- [34 : 32] What's not fair? What they mean by that is they're not kind of making some declaration on, you know, eternal ethics. They're making a declaration just from their self like, I want this and therefore it's unjust for you to take it from me, even though it is solely, sorely not unjust for me to do so as a parent.
- And what the Bible is talking about is it's confronting us with the idea that we need justice. Not just a will to power where we either are enslaved by others or enslave others.
- It confronts our sense of kind of this clean view of religion that Jesus had to spill his blood. Christianity, just like the Old Testament is a bloody religion.
- Life is in the blood. It's also, by the way, going to talk about the nature of sanctification later, because sanctification is not just soul, but it's also body.
- Jesus had a body and he spilled real blood so that we might have his life through his death. That's what he's getting at. It also challenges, and lastly I'll say this, that it challenges our sensibility that the legal declaration that we are righteous, because by the way, in justification, it is God's declaration that you are righteous, even though you in yourself do not change.

[36 : 01] When you turn to Jesus by faith, you don't wake up the next morning with a halo. You don't walk down the high street glowing and people are like, whoa, he must have come to Jesus. He's righteous. No.

The declaration of righteousness is that it's his righteousness. It's an alien righteousness to you. You don't actually, at this point in the gospel, change into a righteous person. That's coming.

But what we see is that sometimes when, if I turn to Jesus, if you're on the cusp of kind of believing the gospel, then you kind of long for this sense of affirmation that something has changed and the legal just doesn't cut it. The idea that God declares you righteous just seems a little too abstract. Many of you know that my youngest son, Beau, who's just 10 months old here, is adopted.

He is not biologically my child or my wife's child. It's been an amazing journey for us to receive him into our home and just been a joy all the way through. We received him at 13 days old, and then it took a long process for a few months to actually for him to become legally our child.

And that day we went down to the courthouse. It was just like any other day at the courthouse. We were kind of the first ones there. We're dressed all nicely. We can't wait to take pictures. The judge is kind of indifferent, kind of writes down, you know, his name on the piece of paper and says, okay, that's it. He's yours. My son, by the way, is not up going like, yes.

[37 : 46] Yes. Woo. I'm your son now. He's asleep. Wasn't that big a deal to him? But you know what happened that day?

He gained an inheritance, not of money, unfortunately, to him, but an inheritance of a lifetime of love and care that I will never leave him or forsake him. I will never turn my back on him. He is my son.

He is well loved and will be well loved. That is the promise of the gospel to you too. Though it's legal, don't tell me that it's cold and abstract. It is the promise of God to you that he now looks at you radically different than he would ever looked at you apart from his righteousness.

Do you believe that? Is that good news to you? Do you see the righteousness of God not merely as something that condemns you because you're trying to live this life of self-righteousness or condemns you because you are trying, you know, so desperately, but you're self-loathing and beating yourself up. But God, by His grace, the righteousness of God breaks into your story.

And what we are going to see in the coming week is that he is going to break into our story and he is not going to leave us there. He's not going to leave us as declared righteous. He's committed in the gospel to make us as he has declared us to be and make us as a people who has he declared us to be so that we might impact the world for what it is to be.

[39 : 43] It is a big view of grace. Grace is not a static thing. Like an old trophy locked away in your closet. You know it's there, but it doesn't really matter. Back then, yeah, I got that.

No, grace is on the move. It is transforming us. It is restoring our relationship to God and it will be the means by which God restores our relationship with ourselves, with each other, and the world. Let me pray. Lord, we pray for a big view of the gospel. We pray and even as we sing now, great is thy faithfulness, that we would celebrate that the gospel, the hope of restoration, rest squarely on you. Thank you, Jesus, that you died and were raised. Help us to believe it and celebrate it and live by the power of it. In Jesus name, amen.