

The Elder Brother

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[0 : 0 0] We're doing something funny tonight and that's preaching our morning sermon series at night and that's because it's been a few weeks since we've been able to get back to Romans and it's gonna be a couple more weeks till we're able to get back to Romans and so we're just trying to get somewhat closer to the original schedule. So we're looking at Romans tonight so hopefully you've been around in the morning a little bit but that's okay if not. This is our sixth look at this letter of Paul to the church in the city of Rome and it's a city that's full of both Jewish and Gentile both Christians and non-Christians.

The Jews had been expelled from Rome in the late 40s and now Paul is writing about a decade later when the Jews had really re-entered the city of Rome and so it's a church there that's full of both Jews and Gentiles from all sorts of ethnic and pagan backgrounds and so far we've seen the main message has really been all about God's revelation that God has made himself known to everybody and he's done that in two ways we saw in chapter 1. The first way is he's made himself known in wrath, in punishment, in judgment. We spent two weeks on that that because humans rebelled against God and violated God's justice we experienced the curse that the order of existence we live in is broken, that relationships are broken and then Derek talked about last time the wrath of God revealed and God giving people what they want, their desires. Derek said he gives us our independence and our independence is slavery. When people chase after desire, desire changes and changes and changes and sends snowballs and compounds and God as a form of wrath gives people over to their deepest desires when they choose against God. Those are the two ways that God's revealed his wrath but he's also revealed something else and that's the gospel, the good news, the message from the herald come over the hill saying that there is a person who can save from God's wrath that God did not leave us in our sins but came to redeem and love and that's chapter 1 that's what we've looked at and this week we come to chapter 2 and you know what it's more wrath, it's more judgment, it's more punishment, we are not we're not out of the woods into the nicer parts of the book of Romans yet. Romans 2 is all about you read it with

Callum, it's all about judgment and justice, it's more about what's wrong, it's more about the fact that everything is not okay, that self-help and moral conformity and rule-following and good advice, it's not the solution and the main point this week is as much as things are not okay for the type of person we read about in Romans 1, the person who goes and worships God, a God through images of birds and reptiles and stone and wood and things, as much as it's not okay for that person, it's also not okay for traditionally religious people either, things aren't okay for the traditionally religious in Romans 2, that they're facing something that's the same as what we read about in Romans 1, so we're gonna look at three things, we're gonna look at the problem of religion, the problem with being religious, which is secondly found in the terrifying and beautiful law of God and thirdly that our only hope paradoxically is in Jesus Christ the judge. So first the problem with religion, verse one here you have no excuse, oh man, you have no excuse, oh man, now the thing you have to see or you have to find out is that both the you there when he talks addresses his reader you and man, obviously man, is in the singular, so this is not a plural you, so what Paul's done here is he's actually home down in on one person in the Roman church, someone maybe he knows or a circumstance that he's heard of, so when he says you have no excuse, he's saying you singular masculine, some man, you man have no excuse and we know that's true because he keeps the singular the whole chapter pretty much and then it becomes plural again after this, but in verse 17 which was just beyond our passage, we know something about this guy, if you singular call yourself a Jew, so this man that he's talking to is Jewish, but the man the purpose for him singling this guy out is because whoever he is is because he stands in the place of any traditionally religious adherent, any traditionally religious person, why? Why is Paul focusing in on one guy who's a Jew who clearly from the chapter has grown up and as a devout Jew as a religious person, why is he focusing on him? And I think it's because and there are there are an endless amount of interpretations and some disagreements about some of the things in this passage, but some of the things we can be sure of is this, because chapter one sounds really pagan and if you were with us you might have caught on to this, just listen verse 23 of chapter one, God has revealed his wrath upon everyone who exchange the glory of God for images of birds and stones, right? Or and then what kind of sin did that lead to? What kind of a lifestyle did that lead to? Verse 28 and following, these people became haters of God, ruthless, murderers, disobedient to their parents, shameless sexual activity, evil. And so what Paul's doing here talking to this one guy, this very religious, traditionally religious adherent, a guy who grew up in the local body of belief in the community, reading the Bible his whole

life probably, he's anticipating because he's looking at what Paul just said in Romans 1 and saying, you've said that the wrath of God is revealed against anybody who worships birds and stone or images of birds through stone and that their life looks like murders, haters of God, ruthless, evil, disobedient to their parents and you can imagine that a Jewish crowd in Rome is saying that's not me, much like many of us here would say the same thing, that that doesn't look like me, the issue is not that Paul's trying to prove to this guy that he's a sinner, he knows he's a sinner, he's not saying that, he's saying but what you've said about the wrath of God being revealed in chapter 1 and it looking like that, being given over into these sins, I don't look like that, I've never looked like that and most of the people I know in this local church community have never looked like that, but you said it's being revealed against everybody so what it seems like, and Paul's addressing this directly, is that God has been partial, to pass over in wrath, to not give a particular ethnic group or particular type of person, a particular type of religious adherent, the same type of wrath that he gives everybody else, he's passed over a particular type of people, he's shown partiality to one group of people and so what Paul's concerned with, you can see it in just the first verse, you have no excuse oh man, every one of you who judges, because in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, he's worried that the people in the local church in Rome, especially the Jews, especially the religious, will look at their pagan brother or sister that had looked like what Romans 1 looks like in the past and judge them and say how could you, how could you do that, how could you be like that, I could never, I could never do, yes I'm a sinner but that's not who I am and I could never be that and it separates, divides the church in Rome into the respectable and the fallen, perhaps redeemed but the respectable and the fallen, it's this type of division between two types of people, so he says in passing judgment you condemn yourself when you judge but why and the reason he says in passing judgment you condemn yourself, he says something incredible here, do you suppose that in verse 3 you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself that you will escape the judgment of God, so he's talking to the religious, he's talking to the the Bible reading Jew here who's standing as a symbol for traditional religion, for growing up in a religious community who's read his Bible the whole life, who's not done the things that we read about in Romans 1 and he's saying but when you look at another person and you judge and you say I could never be like that, I could never do that, don't you know that you do those things too and you say how Paul like how could you possibly say that like because clearly factually there's plenty of us who don't do those things right and this Jewish man that he's talking to probably never did those things, he was not a murderer, he was not a hater of God, never in his whole life, he read his Old Testament and loved Yahweh, the Yahweh he read about he was not evil in the way that Paul's describing in Romans 1, he was not disobedient to his parents, he knew the the decalogue, the Ten Commandments, that you shall honor your father and mother, he basically followed that and so how

could Paul possibly say here to the religious, to the man who's not done these things but when you look out and you judge someone else in this community that has had that past, you condemn yourself because you do them too, how could he possibly say that? In other words verse 9 to 11 long before the late modern push for social justice and equality, God Paul's point here is that God and I Paul and preaching equality in the first century and that's that before God every single person the religious who has been relatively obedient their whole lives and the pagan on the flip side who looks like an absolute mess stands in the same position before God that God shows no partiality, he does not pass over no matter the ethnic group or the religious community one comes from is what he's saying here so how could Paul say to this Jew this Jewish man this religious man that he's done the very same things that's the question point two or yeah part two and the answer is because of the terrifying beauty of

[12 : 08] God's law so Paul starts to get into an answer to this in verse 12 when he starts to talk about the law and basically his answer is to this man is that that he's trying to get at is that the law the law of God has a deep beauty that goes well beyond anything that this religious man can see or has seen so he says for all who have sinned without the law will perish without the law all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law it's not the hears of the law who are righteous before God but the doers of the law who will be justified what he's saying is whether you are traditionally religious and have read the Bible like this man had and read the the Ten Commandments the law of God and its shortened form or if you had never even heard of that you're in the exact exact same position before the law because every single person we learned about this in chapter 1 knows the work of the law by nature before they ever read anything like the Ten Commandments that's what he says that in verse 15 every single human shows that the work of the law is written on their hearts how what's the work of the law it's simple it's when it's when you act poorly and wrongly and your conscience wells up inside and kicks you right in the gut and tells you I know that what I just did was wrong and it's intuitive and what he's saying here is that the law of God is intuitive to every single human being that's born that God gifts it to every single human being it's part of their identity every single human being is born with a conscience and that conscience isn't perfect it's fallible but it it kicks you it's like a goat that you kick against your whole life and it it's constantly pricking you and showing you when you're guilty or giving you security and peace when you know you've done well and you're innocent and that it's universal for Jew and Gentile that everybody is working with the same thing whether it's been externally expressed as the Ten Commandments or something like that or internally expressed as guilt as a consciousness of guilt C.S. Lewis he famously calls it which this was somewhat controversial at the time but he calls it the towel borrowing from a Eastern Eastern term it's a funny term but what he what he's referring to is the fact that he looked across all the nations of the world all the people groups in history and said every single nation when they go to form their society and write their laws always produce something very similar to the Ten

Commandments something within the ballpark of the Ten Commandments and that's because by not because Christianity or in the Old Testament the Jews borrowed these ideas from mother nations no it's because the law is written on every single human heart and so that's the first thing Paul is saying here to the guy that you have to know that you and the pagan the Gentile stand before the law just like you stand before God in the exact same place because you all have the law and what that means what that means and here's what's important what that means is that the law of God is something more than external rules it's something more than thou shalt not thou shalt not thou shalt not the law of God is something much more than that that it actually starts on the inside in the inner life before it works its way out in other words what Paul is trying to get this guy to see is that rule following rule following in an external way does not necessarily correspond to an inner life of righteousness that you can follow the law of God the Ten Commandments externally but that doesn't necessarily correspond to a beautiful life internally of love of true righteousness that there it can be a disparity between those two things in other words if Romans chapter 1 was about the prodigal son the reckless pagan hater of God that goes out and spends all his dad's money basically telling his dad I hate you his father then Romans too is though Paul preaching to the elder brother I mean you remember this you remember Luke 15 right and the story the prodigal son the first son the younger son he goes out and he spends all of his father's wealth he asked for his dad's money and in doing that he's essentially in that culture saying to his father I want you to die because the only way you can get your dad's money and property is is when he passes away and so the younger son says to his father you are dead to me and he goes out and he lives this absolutely reckless life and his life climaxes in the in the way of a pagan or a Gentile in the text because he goes and he not only doesn't eat the pork but he's forced to eat the food that pigs eat in the passage which is talking to a Jewish audience and saying that this guy is below the pigs the unclean animals he's gone as far as you can possibly go he's lost everything that's Romans 1 18 through 32 in in illustrative outline but he comes home and his father sees him on the horizon and his father pulls up his robe and runs out to him and the boy falls to his knees and said I was wrong can I be hired like a servant and he says you're not a servant you're my son to all the pagans out there metaphorically who have done whatever it is who look like Romans 1 18 through 32 whatever you've done it doesn't matter the father runs out to you and he says come home you're not my son you're my son you're my daughter and he throws a feast and he throws a party and what you come to realize then at the very next verse is that this story is not about the prodigal son it's

about the elder brother because the point of the story is that Jesus turns and says meanwhile the older brother was standing out in the field looking out at that party anger bursting up in his heart hatred for his father and his brother at this and he comes to his dad and the older brother defies a major cultural standard at the time by calling his dad out of the party out of a feast that the patriarch was hosting and his dad essentially says to him why are you so angry and he says you're so-called son he won't call him his brother he took everything and he's come back and you just simply throw him a party what about my rights what about what I've done I've stayed here I follow the rules I've been I've religiously adhered to your law inside this household the whole time he's been gone you see and the the key issue in the prodigal son story is that he's so upset because now that the younger brother has been accepted back into the household the older brother will lose another 22% of his deserved inheritance the split at the time is that the older brother gets two thirds of the inheritance the younger brother gets one third the younger brother's already taken his third but now he comes back and his dad accepting him means the older brother's gonna lose another 22% not 33 22 you can do the math later or

I'll explain it to you it's complicated but it's 22 and so what the older brother is saying is what about what I deserve I have followed the rules you owe me and the father stops him and says look everything that I have is yours if you want stuff I'll give you stuff just ask for it my property is your property it's not about that what what about your inner life you are so concerned with rule conformity that you don't actually love your brother who's come home what where's your inner life that's what he's asking asking him everything I have is your stop thinking about your property stop comparing where's your heart where's your heart and at the end of the passage in the story you're on the edge of your seat and you want to know what the older brother does because the father invites him to come into the party and Jesus leaves it he doesn't tell us whether the elder brother came in to the feast he just lets it go why well because he's speaking to the religious moralists he's speaking to the Jewish man of Romans too and saying yeah you followed all the rules externally but where's your heart where's your inner life do you love your brother or are you judging the guys next to you because of their former pat because of their past and dividing the church you see that the law is not merely about rule following it's about uncovering true beauty which is the beauty of a heart that loves God and loves neighbor that's not stuck on mere religious moral conformity but moral conformity is an outwork of a heart that truly loves righteousness and that's the difference which means the background to what Paul saying here is the Sermon on the Mount the Sermon on the Mount it's a revolution and understanding the truth about what the law of God really is that the law of

God is not merely external rules but there to uncover the beauty of a changed heart the religious man of Romans too the symbolic religious man of Romans too he he says I've never murdered I've never been a hater of God I've never done shameless sexual acts Jesus comes in Matthew 5 and 7 it says 5 to 7 and says you've never murdered have you ever been angry have you ever wanted to you've never done shameless sexual acts are you married have you ever looked at another woman and lost it after her have you ever looked at another man it's not your husband and lust had desired more than your spouse the law is something much much deeper you see the mere rule conformity on the external in the external and that's why it's terrifying it's terrifying because you read the Sermon on the Mount and you say that's not me that's not me if this is what it means to enter into the kingdom I'm never getting in I'm not this person because every time Jesus brings up one of the issues the only answer that each of us can give is yes yes I've done that yes I've done that I am just like the pagan do you not know that as you judge them you condemn yourself that's what Paul saying look at the Sermon on the Mount you condemn yourself you've broken every one of the laws because it's about what's happening in your heart not what's happening on the on mere external appearance it's terrifying and at the same time you know it's beautiful because when you read the Sermon on the

[24 : 43] Mount you think this is exactly what I want my spouse to look like and my roommates and my parents and my brothers and sisters if only they looked like the person Jesus is talking about right here my life would be so much easier and you know you want everybody in your life around you to be like that to be just like what Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount and then when you read it you know that you can never be that person that you can never do it it's terrifying and it's beautiful at the same time you see it's both and so what Paul is saying here to the religious to the person who's grown up beware beware in other words it's so dangerous to think my heart is somehow less capable of certain sins than it is for those people that my heart is incapable of doing that you know criminal psychology has shown this repeatedly if you I got into a phase where I was really interested in criminal psychology last year watching tons of YouTube videos of interviews of deeply pathological criminals but one of the things I learned listening to them is that they often say that they were pretty ordinary people that found themselves doing things that they used to tell themselves they could never do that they would never be capable of

Alexander Solzhenitsyn the Russian author he wrote a very famous book called the gulag archipelago which was about the Russian death camps the Russian work camps Solzhenitsyn was a Russian soldier and he was on the front lines of World War two when Germany invaded the Soviet Union and he wrote letters to his friends at the time when that happened as a soldier that said basically that Russia was ill-prepared had no idea what they were doing that the front line was a disaster that they basically set us up for slaughter that the Russian government had really let down the troops and because of that those letters were confiscated and he was thrown into a gulag a work camp death camp in Russia and he was there for many many years just to give you the figures I mean the deaths are estimated at on the high end up to 60 million in the Russian gulags between 1919 and 1959 under both Lenin and Stalin and he writes in this book that he tries to after years put himself in the position of the soldiers that are running the death camps and he says this after talking about how in the early days how much hatred he had for them he says if only it were also simple if only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate the evil people from the rest of us and destroy them but I've learned that the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being and who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart he goes on in another place where he's talking about the same thing asking himself if I had the chance would I take the place of the soldier would I put the soldier into the death camp and me as the executioner this is what he says confronted by the pit into which we are about to toss those who have done us harm these soldiers we halt stricken dumb it is after only it is after all only because of the way things worked out that I that they were the executioner and I was not and in other words he's saying I can never believe that I'm not in that I'm incapable of falling into something like this the thing I see around me and this is true in the Bible too right because we can see this in the life of David the man after God's own heart the psalmist and then one morning he woke up and in a day he had become the adulterer and the murderer this was the man after God's own heart and what Paul is saying here is that the true law the true laws revealed in the life that's driven by a beautiful changed righteous heart which means that the external just because the external life is kept in check it doesn't necessarily mean that the internal life has been changed the human heart needs repentance the human heart needs repentance no matter what kind of background any of us may have now briefly and finally the only hope here the only hope because God is not partial to the religious or the pagan the only hope is paradoxically Jesus the judge that's what Paul says here Jesus the judge is the only hope and we see that if you look down on verse 16 Paul says to this man this religious man

there's coming a day when according to the gospel God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ so this man in the text is looking at what Paul said in verse one in Romans chapter one and he's saying you're saying the wrath of God has been revealed on all these people by giving them over into all these sorts of terrible things you've listed and that's not me so I don't see the wrath of God being revealed in my life and what Paul's saying to him in verse 16 is there is a revelation that you have not seen yet there is a revelation of God's wrath that you have not seen yet and it's that day when Jesus Christ will judge the secret life of men of men and women and so what he does is he throws him he says look you need to know this you're just simply thinking about what's external what you can see the wrath of God revealed all around you and your own moral conformity that everybody else can see but you need to think about what you can't see and what you can't see is that Jesus Christ has been appointed the judge at the end of time to judge the secret life of every human being their thoughts their deepest desires my thoughts my deepest desires your thoughts and deepest desires everything that goes on inside the majority of the time that you talk all day is internal dialogue and it's what it's that that he's drawing is it the man's attention to the religious man saying you need to know that the inner life is what's at stake here is what's coming up before the throne of God not just moral conformity in your local community and you need to wake up and see it and what what he's doing here is he's pointing him to the second coming of Christ when Jesus Christ becomes judge of all of humanity in order that he will turn back and look at the first coming you see in other words he's saying if you look at the end of time your only hope is to look back at the middle it's to look back at the middle we learn about Jesus the judge all through throughout the Gospels it's not something that we talk about very much Jesus Christ as judge but it is something very clear in the New

Testament that he is by the power of his resurrection just a couple passages Matthew 11 and 28 God the Father gives all things or authority over to the Son as the judge John 3 at the very beginning of the book of John this is judgment that the light has come into the world this is judgment at the incarnation the incarnation is Jesus the light coming in the world and judging the world by the very presence of Jesus saying this world is not what it ought to be we are not what we ought to be we stand condemned but the very next the very verse before it this is judgment the light has come into this darkness of a world that we live in but in the first coming the light did not come to condemn but to save you see Paul's pointing this religious man to the end of time where Jesus will judge the thoughts of every human to say but there is hope and that's because Jesus the judge came the first time not to condemn but to save for the Jew and for the Gentile for the pagan for the religious no matter what you've done and no matter how good you've been on the surface for anybody the hope is in the middle of history and what's the hope and the hope is this well Athanasius the great church father he put it this way the judge of all things has been judged because of you so that you may be exalted Jesus Christ the judge of heaven and earth became the one judged so that we might not be judged at the end of time you see Jesus Christ is the judge that became judged for us so that we might not be judged at the end of time and that's what Paul is saying is the only hope for the religious and the pagan the judge that was judged for us he says do you not know that God has been so kind to you to give you time to repent repent if you do if we do if we repent of what's wrong in the inner life not just the outer then we will not face a judge but a brother at the end of time which is close with this what

I've said this before when I preached on Luke 15 so you might have heard it but what should the elder brother and the prodigal son story have done when his little brother told his father I hate you and ran off with the inheritance what should what should the elder brother the true elder brother have done says that the prodigal went off into the far country the true elder brother he wouldn't have stayed behind soaking up all the goods that he possibly could from his dad he would have gone out into the far country into the wilderness into the mess into the pigsty that his brother had found himself in and he would have captured him and brought him home you see and that's exactly what Jesus Christ the judge the true elder brother did for us in the middle of history and in that way everybody's everybody's a prodigal whether you're religious or not Jesus

[36 : 24] Christ the elder brother he went out into the far country and he judged himself he became the judge so that we might not be at the end of history and that's the only hope I'll just leave you with this question 52 of the Heidelberg Catechism we don't do this very often catechism stuff but this is a catechism that was written during the time of the Reformation and it nails Romans too how does Christ return to judge the living and the dead comfort you is the question answer in all distress and persecution with uplifted head I confidently await the very judge who has already offered himself to the judgment of God in my place and removed the whole curse from me let's pray our Lord Jesus we give thanks to you for giving yourself up to the judgment we deserve so that we might not be judged and we confess to you whether we've grown up as good citizens religious people or reckless spin-thrift prodigals we confess that the beauty of the heart the righteousness of the heart is the question and the problem we need new hearts we repent oh Lord give us hearts of repentance break our hearts of stone give us hearts of flesh no matter where we come from no matter what we've done no matter where we are now we ask for this in Christ's name

Amen