

Reformation Day 2021 Sermon
“The Sad Truth about Your Goodness”

Epistle: Romans 3:19–28

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it — the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Gospel: John 8:31-36

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?” Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

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We begin with these verses from Romans:

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Simply put... It means that NO ONE is above the law. It means that the LAW of God applies to everyone equally. There are no exceptions... there are no exemptions... There is no PRIVILEGE.

Not for you. Not for me. Not for anyone. No one is righteous, not even one.

We are ALL, EQUALLY UNDER THE LAW. And slaves to sin.

Anyone who claims otherwise is a liar. And when they are called to account... made to stand before the judgement seat...they will NOT be able to say anything in their own defense. Their words will jam in their throats. They will not be able to speak... not because they are not going to be allowed to speak. They will not be able to speak because their own words will condemn them. They will not be permitted to lie or deceive, and so they will not be able to say any words at all, because they will not be able to bear to speak the truth.

The world, and everyone in it, will be held to this accounting. That is why our Lord's description of this event is: *That outside the Kingdom is WEEPING and GNASHING of teeth.*

Saint Paul goes on to write to the saints in the Church in Rome:

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

In other words, the whole purpose of the law is to bring us to the knowledge that we are ALL SINNERS. Not one of us is righteous, not a single one of us. NO ONE... Not you, not me, no one will be able to stand before God and claim entry into His kingdom based on anything they think they've *done* or who they think they are, NOR anything... and listen to this very carefully... NOR anything they might BELIEVE ABOUT THEMSELVES. The key words there are *about themselves*.

Such as, believing themselves to be "good" or maybe even a little BETTER than good.

Now that's bad news; it also happens to be the truth. And if you are willing to accept it, then it SHOULD be pretty humbling, and, well, heartbreaking... disappointing.... To a point that, we like the disciples might ask "THEN WHO CAN BE SAVED?"

Now here is the proclamation of the Good News for all people...

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—

the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

Since human righteousness CANNOT save us, the GOOD NEWS that there is *another* kind of righteousness available to us should be welcome and relieving news. Peace, joy, and such other reactions should follow upon gaining the information that the existence of this NEW righteousness is available to EVERYONE, ANYONE, who will place their trust in the merits of Jesus Christ on your behalf.

And this isn't some invention, some made up story, a lie... because the LAW itself bears witness to what the prophets have always said: THERE IS GOOD NEWS.

GOD will provide the sacrifice. And so this has transpired in Jesus Christ.

So, Saint Paul drives the point home. He begins the message of the Gospel saying...

For there is no distinction:

What does this mean, no distinction? This means being able to point out a difference... To discriminate or tell the difference between people. Being able to say these people belong to one group (let's say, the GOOD people) and these others belong to another group (let's call them the BAD people). But St. Paul is adamant... NO!

There is no distinction: for ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

You can't make a distinction, You can't discriminate or treat people differently. We are ALL THE SAME. We all belong to the SAME group, the SAME people, the SAME family, the SAME race. The human race. And the LAW of God condemns us ALL EQUALLY. NO ONE gets separated out as better or worse. We ALL STAND IN the JUDGEMENT of God, and are called sinners. This is true and it is the LAW.

BUT our HOPE is in the GOSPEL... We are justified by His grace as a gift.

A GIFT. It's not something we can EARN. We do not acquire it by what we are able to DO for ourselves... God gives us His GRACE as His GIFT... Because He loves us and wants us to LIVE and not die

GRACE: Getting that which we DON'T deserve... Don't deserve and cannot earn.

What is grace that we DON'T deserve? The forgiveness of our sins.
How is this possible, that God has made this possible for us?

through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation

That is a grand church word right there...propitiation. It's a word we use so seldomly that if I asked most pastors to define it, I think they would stumble to offer a meaningful definition of that word.

Certainly you might be able to infer, a vague idea, of something like an offering made to God... but it is much more profound. In fact, it is a legal term, meeting the definition of the LAW.

The LAW must be SATISFIED. The LAW must be FULFILLED... You CAN'T simply toss the Law aside and IGNORE it just because you don't like or meet the requirements... You can't just overlook the SIN, the CRIME, the MISDEED.

Our GOD is a GOD of JUSTICE... and under the LAW, Justice MUST be done ... because THAT'S FAIR!

Just ask a child if it's FAIR if people are treated differently under the LAW?

Not playing fair is CHEATING... Not being fair with all people is discrimination... NOT playing by the rules is SINNING. It's UNJUST and UNFAIR.

Our God is more than merely good, our God is holy and RIGHTEOUS. He keeps His LAW because he is JUST.

The LAW of God is clear... the wages of sin is DEATH. The place of death is HELL.

Sinners, Lawbreakers ALL get what they deserve ... DEATH and HELL.

If GOD is going to be GRACIOUS to us... The LAW is STILL going to have to be kept.

SOMEONE must pay the price for SIN. SOMEONE MUST DIE in our PLACE and be sent to HELL... ENTER our Lord Jesus Christ... *For GOD* (in reference to Jesus) *made*

Him who knew no sin to become sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

We receive God's forbearance by FAITH. I suppose it is almost too much to believe that our Holy God would put his OWN SON, His OWN SELF, to death in our place... But He did.

And the ONLY way we receive this AMAZING GIFT is to TRUST and BELIEVE it is the truth.

It is certainly very HUMBLING... getting what we don't deserve...

So humbling, in fact, that St. Paul directs us to look at who we are... We DID NOTHING to EARN our place in Heaven. It came to us as a DIVINE GIFT. He addresses these next few sentences to the pride-filled hearts of Christians...

Then what becomes of our boasting?

What is unimaginable is that we ARE ALL SAVED... EVERYONE... For our Lord Jesus Christ DIED for the sins of the WHOLE WORLD. Everyone is SAVED, even the UNBELIEVER... the problem for the unbeliever isn't that they are NOT SAVED... the problem for the unbeliever is that they don't BELIEVE it. They leave their gift on the table, so to speak. This creates a distinction of sorts... not between the "good" people, the "nice" people and the "bad" people and sinners. NO... there ARE only SINNERS.

The distinction is between those who receive this good news and *believe* and those who receive this good news but still *refuse* to believe.

As the Gospel writer makes clear...

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The boasting in our salvation, like we earned it? It is not permitted...

It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

That means being patient and compassionate toward sinners, because WE TOO are SINNER... is the LAW of LOVE.

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." -*John 8:31-36*