

## GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS REVEALED

PASTOR MARC D. WILSON, ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH, LAS CRUCES, NM

### Romans 3:9-26 (Psalm 14)

*Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds that we may freshly understand the amazing depths and riches of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for our good and the Father's glory. AMEN.*

As I prayerfully consider the Spiritual gifts of many of you at St. Patrick's and how you could wonderfully serve the Gospel, I am also driven to pray that many of you would first have a deeper desire to be served by God in His Gospel. What I am saying is that, my pastoral perspective is primarily focused on you spending more and more time rejoicing in and understanding the righteousness of God in the Gospel. I want to see this in your lives far more than serving the various temporal needs of our congregation, as important as these may be. Any true desire to be served, fed and nourished by God can be satisfied when we are mutually encouraged by our faith in the Gospel. Growing in our grasp of, and confidence in, the Gospel with our Christian brothers and sisters fuels genuine love for Jesus and each other. It then becomes less about what we can do and all about what God has already graciously done for us; giving Him thanks, glory and praise for it. Today, in God's grace, we will see how rich, deep and wonderful it is to spend time resting and rejoicing in the righteousness of God revealed in His Gospel. My prayer is that this makes you hungry for more.

Romans 1:18-3:20 thoroughly demonstrates that everyone, Jews and Gentiles (categorizing all of humanity for Paul), is under God's just judgment. This is because we are all under the power of sin. This will be clarified today as we conclude this section of Paul's letter. Then, we will move into Romans 3:21-5:21, where Paul demonstrates that Jesus has become the living revelation of God's righteousness, so everyone who believes in this Gospel – Jews and Gentiles alike – can be right with God. Today, we will transition from the Bad News we have been

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PASTOR MARC D. WILSON, ST. PATRICK'S CHURCH, LAS CRUCES, NM considering for a while, which is we are all under God's righteous judgment, to the Good News, which is the gift of God's righteousness. God's righteousness is a **gift** through faith in Jesus. This is the Gospel, and we do well as King Jesus' servants to remember, rejoice and rest in this Gospel continuously if we are to eagerly proclaim it. After all, this, *above all else*, is what we are set apart for.

### 1. The Bad News Again - Humanity's Unrighteousness Affirmed (Verses 9-20)

- a. In Romans 3:1-8, we understood that while there is, indeed, an advantage to being part of God's People who receive His promises, that advantage would not compromise God's righteousness in condemning unrighteousness. That is why Paul's answer to the opening question of our passage receives the answer: "Not at all!"
  - i. Verse 9 While there is an advantage in having "the oracles of God" that contain the Law, the Covenants and especially God's Promises, this advantage is NO advantage when it comes to God's just judgment against unrighteousness.
    1. Verse 19-20 Having God's special revelation in the Bible; knowing His Law / His righteous standards that we are **unable** to achieve, simply makes us aware of our sin. And, here is the issue for humanity; Jew & Gentile alike...for everyone.
  - ii. The Problem is the power of sin over humanity. By nature, we are enslaved to sin and cannot escape neither its power nor the deserved condemnation it brings upon us. We need to be rescued. God alone can do that.
- b. The Psalms and Isaiah cited by Paul in verses 10-18 demonstrate Human Depravity in both Jews and Gentiles; in both those who know God's special revelation in the Bible and those who only have God's revelation of Himself in the Creation and their consciences.

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- i. KEY: The whole world is accountable to God, and no one is righteous; not even one.

### **2. The Good News for All Who Believe - God's Righteousness Revealed (Verses 21-26)**

#### a. God's Process of Making us Righteous (*verses 21-22*)

- i. Verse 21 "But now..." indicates BOTH a major transition in salvation history AND in Paul's letter. "Apart from the Law" that the righteousness of God has been made known does NOT mean apart from God's promises. That is why Paul affirms that the Law and the Prophets testify to the Gospel; because, BOTH are aspects of the "word/oracles" of God entrusted to His People mentioned in verse 2.
- ii. Verse 22 Paul uses the word "faith" as he did back in Romans 1:17 to demonstrate how God's revealed process of making us righteous is received and applied to us. We receive it through "faith"/ "believing in" Jesus Christ. That is backed up by the repetition "all who believe." All have sinned, but all who believe in Jesus Christ receive the righteousness of God. It is by our "faith" that we are justified; or declared righteous.

#### b. God's Consistent Righteous Character (*verses 25-26*)

- i. Verse 25 "a sacrifice of atonement" (in the NIV) should take us back to the image of the mercy seat, or lid of the Ark of the Covenant upon which the blood of animals was splashed on the Day of Atonement to cover the sins of the Israelites.
- ii. Verse 26 The OT "mercy seat" and "place of atonement" is now applied to Jesus Christ. What once occurred behind the veil in the Most Holy Place has now been publically revealed in the "once-for-all" sacrifice of Jesus that brought an end to the OT sacrificial system. Paul demonstrates that Jesus now has the place of the mercy seat in the OT. Jesus is the

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perfect and final provision for atonement; and this can only be appropriated by faith. God's demonstration of "His righteousness" highlights His divine consistent, holy and righteous character that would require Him to punish sin. While God left sin unpunished in the past; because, the blood of animals could not adequately deal with human sin, it was NOT due to His indifference toward sin. God is justly angry with sin, and it must be punished. God's delay in punishing sin was so that He could demonstrate His righteous, just, character "at the present time" in Jesus as a sacrifice for atonement, so that, those who receive this revelation by faith, may be justified by God as a gift.

c. The Gospel: God is both just and the One Who justifies. This means God is just even in graciously justifying those who have faith in Jesus. God is just, or righteous, in His wrath and condemnation of sin demonstrated in the crucifixion of Jesus as our substitute. By this act, God punishes sin consistently with His holy righteous character, but God also justifies us, declares us right with Him, by our believing in this revealed act of His righteousness. God does for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We cannot be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law, BUT the righteousness of God is available to all people, equally, through faith in Jesus Christ...to all who believe. God, Who is righteous, can freely justify those who believe without compromising His own justice; because, sin has been justly punished in Jesus.

i. Verses 23-24 Again, this righteousness from God that has been made known in Jesus is for anyone who believes; because, we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. This means that our sinfulness distorts the glory of God that we were created to reflect as His divine imagers, but all types of people are freely

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justified by the grace of this Gospel that reveals the righteousness of God.

- ii. Therefore, those who are given righteousness through our faith in Jesus Christ believe that we are cleansed from our sin and redeemed from its tyrannical control over our lives through the shedding of His Blood. We believe that Jesus' death on the cross was our sacrificial substitute to satisfy God's just wrath against us for our sin that requires condemning punishment. Now, Jesus' Blood definitively covers our filth and corruption. We are forever forgiven for all our sins (past, present and future). This is the rich, deep and amazing Gospel that I desire each of us to rejoice in and remember regularly with one another for our rest and refreshment.

God has acted in Jesus to deliver individuals like you and me from the power of sin and to bring us into a new and right relationship with Himself. God justly punishes the violation of His just standards without compromising His faithfulness to His promises.

Our justification (i.e., being made righteous before God) is a gracious act of God on our behalf. Nothing we ever do, from attempting to observe the externals of Law to serving Him and His People, contributes to the righteous status He freely gives through Jesus' sacrifice. Remembering this and taking refuge in this truth are fundamental to "the obedience of faith."

This recognition of refuge in the Lord Jesus means we desire the one essential thing, which is sitting at the feet of Jesus to learn about Him. It means we first allow Jesus to wash our feet by deepening our understanding and appreciation of the greater cleansing He gave us through His shed blood on the Cross. While we are all Members of the

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Body of Christ equipped to serve in various ways, we must realize, first of all, that we need the power of God in His Gospel that reveals His righteousness more than anything else. And that comes, not from doing, but from giving thanks and praise for this wonderful Gospel..frequently with one another.

Unity in the Gospel, by regularly rejoicing in it, resting in it, and remembering it with other Christians, mutually encourages us for the eager proclamation of the Gospel to which we are called as servants of King Jesus.

AMEN.