

Sunday 09 November 2009 Sermon - King's Centre Christian Church, Sheffield, UK

Romans 4: Justification

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Why should Romans matter to me?

What is the purpose of the series?

- **Catch a vision of**
 - power of gospel to free people
 - a vision of a free life (so that you can put old self to death)
 - steps to moving from justification (being saved) to sanctification (living free and to the max)

POWERPOINT

Aim to profoundly 'get' the gospel (UP) – if you do you'll be profoundly changed (IN) and be motivated to profoundly change the world (OUT)

So far in the series:

- after an introduction of the gospel, the good news, we looked in detail at the default condition of humanity and the world
 - under wrath
 - how humanity makes choices which can take them away as well as towards God
 - Including what it is to be 'lost' and why it matters
- Then **last week** Nike spoke about how God sees us, and the central statements of 3:21-26 – and how we might live differently in response.
 - If we theologically 'get' them = believing believers

Today I'm going to continue to paint the picture for you of the **central theme** that Paul teaches throughout Romans – that of **justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ**

- I'm very keen to **paint a picture, however stark and potentially unpalatable** it might appear on the surface (Paul calls it 'the scandal of the cross'), of the reality of the human condition when we are apart from God.
- Because this will make us appreciate justification in front of God all the more
 - Through nothing we can do or earn
 - Simply through faith in Jesus Christ (and all the benefits that brings)
- So – 3 scenarios

After this sermon, we begin to look at how to apply these truths to our everyday life –

- how to work towards living freer from sin,
- the call to redeem societies and creation,
- the 'life to the full' through Jesus that the gospel promises,
- to live in unity with others and with zeal for mission (the theme of Romans)

This sermon - Freedom/ power of gospel/ free us from Satan's dominion

- **It's the gospel again! Romans is all about the 'good news'.**
- Sure some of it is complicated to get our heads around, some is written with a heavily Jewish background which is unfamiliar to us.
- But its Paul's most thorough unpacking of what it means to be a follower of Jesus – and why.

- Not the whole gospel – got to read the 4 Gospels & rest of OT, NT – but some profound truths

Reading Romans 3:21-26 (New Living Translation)

- But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses^[1] and the prophets long ago.²² We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.²³ For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.²⁴ Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.²⁵ For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past,²⁶ for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.

From The Message

²¹⁻²⁴But in our time something new has been added. What Moses and the prophets witnessed to all those years has happened. The God-setting-things-right that we read about has become Jesus-setting-things-right for us. And not only for us, but for everyone who believes in him. For there is no difference between us and them in this. Since we've compiled this long and sorry record as sinners (both us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ.

²⁵⁻²⁶God sacrificed Jesus on the altar of the world to clear that world of sin. Having faith in him sets us in the clear. God decided on this course of action in full view of the public—to set the world in the clear with himself through the sacrifice of Jesus, finally taking care of the sins he had so patiently endured. This is not only clear, but it's now—this is current history! God sets things right. He also makes it possible for us to live in his rightness.²⁷⁻²⁸ So where does that leave our proud Jewish insider claims and counter-claims? Canceled? Yes, canceled. What we've learned is this: God does not respond to what we do; we respond to what God does. We've finally figured it out. Our lives get in step with God and all others by letting him set the pace, not by proudly or anxiously trying to run the parade.

All about God, not us

Let me say something upfront. **Don't treat this passage as if it's about you and me. It's not.** It's about God the Trinity – that when he justifies people, rescues them, in Christ Jesus, he is acting rightly, fairly and justly – because of what happened at the cross.

- He puts us right
- He makes the sacrifice
- To him be the glory!

Scenario 1 + **POWERPOINT**

How do you feel when a criminal escapes justice?

- Perhaps for war crimes or genocide.
- Or economic crime – illegally financial dealings, so powerful & vested interests they never get punished, while many suffer? Or a corrupt politician (Mobutu in Zaire – personal wealth about same as national debt...)
- You want them to be punished. You want justice to be done.

How much does it matter that God is fair?

- You get angry at a football game – ref's dodgy decision making – unfair penalty
- Or when a colleague gets promoted despite their incompetence
- God – the supreme ruler of the universe, the maker of heaven and earth – needs to be just, fair, true – or the whole thing falls apart.

But if God is fair, and just.... How can he forgive?

- How can the judge of the earth (Gen 18:25) forgive those who, by our own admission, are guilty?
- The message of the gospel, and of Romans Ch 1-3 is that these days humanity's default position before God (before believing Christians) is guilty of sin – and so worthy of receiving their just deserts, their just punishment.
 - How can he forgive?

This is basically the message of Sermon 2 (Nick's one) on wrath of God. Get the download. We looked at Rom 1:18+. In today's passage Romans 3:23 says "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

- The greek word is **hamartano** – meaning 'to miss the mark (and so not share in the prize)',¹ – like an archery term, falling short of the target.
- So each of us is incapable of hitting the target – we all commit sin.

The effect of **humanity's default position (before believing Christians)** is that we are **alienated from God**

- we are under God's wrath and just judgement.
- Again – important to appreciate the reasons why – not because God hates us, loves to punish us – but because he is SO totally holy and just, that he cannot stomach sin, can't be near it.

In fact, it was the opposite originally. What we were created for originally – before the fall – was what the bible calls '**righteousness**' – **an unadulterated friendship and relationship to the glorious God.**

- In fact, we had God's glory – we shone & reflected God so clearly. And one day, believers will again shine with the same glory.

Now because there is sin in the world – and in us (and **let's be honest**, this might sound a bit harsh but which one of you is going to suggest there is *no* sin in you?)... we have forfeited and lost that glory (Rom 1:23)

¹ <http://scripturetext.com/romans/3-23.htm>

- **By ourselves we can't reach the standard of 'righteousness' any longer – we miss the target.**
- We can't **reach the life source** of the universe – and so **we begin to die**. (Roman 6:23)

And that, put very starkly, is the default position of each person in Sheffield, until they come into relationship with Jesus Christ.

Many times in the NT Paul calls people in this condition '**dead in our sins**'. It is not the case that God is hardwired to forgive, and so offending him doesn't actually matter – **like it's a game**.

- **We must take this seriously!**
- WH Auden got it 100% wrong, living like someone from the end of Romans chapter 1, when he said "I like to commit crimes. God likes to forgive them. Really the world is admirably arranged."²
- Its not God's job to forgive sins, his job is justice. God does not like to have to forgive sins. God does not like sin.

But the good news is that while God's holiness sets the standard, his mercy and love allow for an answer to the problem...

Scenario 2 + **POWPEROINT**

How do you feel when mercy triumphs over justice?

- When a person who would reasonably have been punished, is set free without earning it
- This week Simon Mann - released this week only 16 months after he was sentenced to 34 years in prison for plotting a coup against Equatorial Guinea, in Africa.
- Or what about in the movies – when the nasty character deserves to die for his actions, but the good guy lets him go instead
 - Eg. Grima Wormtongue LOTR

Well folks... that's the gospel!

Romans 3 says, despite the reality that everyone has fallen short of God's righteous standards and deserves punishment which is death.... verse 21 "now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, revealed... the righteousness of God that is through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe....(v24) they are now justified by grace as a gift (ie. Because it is undeserved), through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..."

The main point of this passage is that **the righteousness of God**, lost from humanity after the fall and sin, is **back on the agenda in a big way**.

- It's been made public – (v21) it is manifested (made plain), and demonstrated by God in the person and work of Jesus (v25)

Now – **let me remind you again, that this passage is not about us. It's about the Trinity and about the Covenant** (Which is why KC focuses so much on the Trinity, and Covenant, and Kingdom).

- Once again, you didn't achieve this state of being justified – the legal picture of being declared to be not guilty in court before a just judge. (Remember the judge last time?)
 - Jesus achieved it for you, and you obtain it through Him – through active faith in Him.

²² Christopher Ash, *Teaching Romans Vol 1*, Proclamation Trust Media : London, 2009, p.148

- This is why I'm using the picture of a guilty party being set free
- **There is no 'law' no means, no set of rules and regulation, not even a set of good charitable works that you can do, to put you right in God's eyes.**
- **It simply comes down to faith** – believing and accepting the free gift that comes through Jesus Christ.
 - [This is what the Jews were being brought up short for by Paul –
 - sitting secure thinking their observance of the Torah laws put them at peace with God.
 - Modern Christian equivalents too
 - That's why identity is so key – Adoption & Sonship (free, unmerited grace, with massive inheritance)
 - Mindset is key – Covenant & Kingdom. Rights with responsibility. Abide & bear fruit. Be & do etc

BREAK + POWERPOINT

People new to Christianity, or from other faiths, often ask – why does it matter so much about Jesus. Why hark on about Jesus so much, what's wrong with God alone?

- Why do we say that **Jesus saves?**

V22-25 – explain why. It has to do with Covenant. **POWERPOINT**

The only way God sees men & women who have faith as righteous, is through Jesus. **He sees them through Jesus Christ**

- Because of Jesus' Covenant faithfulness.
- None of us is loyal, faithful to God by nature. But Jesus was
 - Jesus was the one perfect Israelite, who kept the Laws of Moses perfectly.
 - It wasn't the law that was at fault, it was the Israelites who were trying to keep it.
 - So it wasn't a new law that was needed (which is why Paul never says the law is to be forgotten about, like a mistake on God's part), it was a faithful Israelite that was needed to complete and **meet the law.**
 - **The law of the Covt – the means of becoming righteous & having relationship with God**
- So now everyone (whether or not born as an Israelite) can share in his status as a faithful Israelite (3:22). All who now believe are now in the Covt – and share Jesus's status.
- **By his faithfulness (our all sufficient saviour) as our substitute on our behalf, we can be put right with God.**
 - Not just Christians since Christ, but anyone who followed the covenant by faith like Abraham and David, before Jesus was born.(v.25)

In Covenant – It's not a matter that we are pardoned from sin.

- Humans are actually punished for sin. The punishment happens – but it is taken not by humans, but by God himself, through the incarnate person of Jesus Christ.

BLACK CLOAK – over me then over Cross

- The punishment has happened, I have been punished (because God is just and fair – or else everything falls apart – Scenario 1).

But the great news is that the punishment fell, not on me, but on God himself in the human Jesus.

- Briefly – we need to debunk the idea that this is **some kind of cruel punishment** of Jesus the Son, by a mean father. Its not ‘cosmic child-abuse’. **Jesus is not an innocent 3rd party.**
 - **He, being God, chose this path.**
- The wonder of the covenant is that, since the dawn of mankind when sin entered our condition, **God has set in place a means to get us back into righteousness again, and it’s called Covenant.**
- It’s called relationship, faithful love – like an ideal marriage.
- **And the climax of the covenant is the self-sacrifice of God, to get us back on right terms.**
 - The mystery and majesty of the gospel is that, not only is God the Trinity holy and just, but also willing to take the hit personally, to become sin for a while, so that we might become sons.
 - “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor. 5:21)

I know that is complicated. But I hope it also sets the pulse racing! This is the glorious good news.

- Now when my father in heaven looks at me, he doesn’t see my sin, he sees Jesus – because I am ‘in’ Jesus
- Now I’m declared not guilty.
- If I enter into the covenant with God, which comes through faith – and no other means – in Jesus Christ. Who is alive and waiting for your call!

Scenario 3 **POWERPOINT**

And so to our third picture idea....

The Brits love to see the under-dog win don’t we? In a fight, or a rugby game, or even in X-Factor or Strictly.

How does it feel when you see the little guy, being knocked about, being bullied and beaten – suddenly tag and swap with a strong, powerful partner?

- Like in wrestling when the little guy is down on the ground... just struggles over to the side reaches out a just tags the other partner who is raring to go, not hurt at all, in he rages and its game-on...

That’s how it is for those who believe in Jesus.

- In v.24 its called ‘**redemption**’
 - I’m released from the power of sin and alienation, by the payment of a ransom
 - **I’ve tagged Jesus’ hand** – and his right standing has got me out of the wrestling ring
 - But this time, he’s the **weaker party** – he allows himself to be beaten and killed in the battle, so that I don’t have to be
- In v.25 comes the deepest reason – what is called ‘**propitiation**’ (or in the NIV a ‘sacrifice of atonement by his blood’)
 - A propitiation is a sacrifice which takes away wrath.
 - **A wrath-quencher**
 - It satisfies God’s anger and justice

- **Only the power of the cross, the spilt blood in the violent death of the sinless Jesus, God himself on earth, only this could be enough**
 - That's why we celebrate communion together!

Now I am connected with God again.

- Sure, I still sin and I still fall short
- at times I am **bullied and occasionally beaten by sin in my life** (Andy's sermon next time on Rom 6+7) .
- But the **difference now is that, as I struggle, there is someone much bigger on my team** – a stronger tag partner. My old nature is in conflict with sin, I still attract it but I also have tools to beat it.
- Our champion Jesus stands with us – more than that, I stand IN him.
 - **And He has already beaten that bully of Sin, and he forgives us when we fail.**
- So now, because of the Covenant, we can be the **victors and not the victims**
 - Rom 8:37 – “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”
- This is how it is that in 5:1-5 Paul says we can ‘boast’ in our covenant partner Jesus in whom, and through whom, we are justified and become at peace with God.

Conclusion

- 3:21-26
 - About what God has done
 - Only possible thru Jesus
 - Its all about Covenant
 - This is the power of gospel
 - Tremendous power of gospel to free people

(song = ‘Upon the throne of God above... “Because the sinless saviour died, my sinful soul is counted free. For God the just is satisfied to look on Him and pardon me.”)

- How should we live in response?

REPENT – BECOME A CHRISTIAN

REFLECT ON THE AWE OF HOW WE ARE SAVED

REMEMBER the power of forgiveness to live a new life – our covenant ‘tag’ partner

WORSHIP