

# The Saviour who saves and silences us

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, please do open your Bibles with me to that passage in Romans 3, verse 21 to 26. Paul writes this extraordinary letter to the Romans, both to humble pride in the church and to hearten proclamation by the church.

We know from the letter envelope, the top and tail that encloses the main body of the letter, that his great desire was that the church in Rome should be a missionary church, striving together with him in his great desire to outreach to the ends of the earth.

And no proud church will ever be a missionary church. It will be divided within and it will be diffident without. The pride of religion is what leads to horrible divisions in churches.

People looking down on one another and resenting one another and struggling with one another.

And it's religious pride that leads to the death of mission for the same reasons.

Because where the privilege of grace is not understood, the power of grace is not seen to change people's lives, then the proclamation of the gospel will not be trusted to change people's lives and we will silence the gospel.

[ 1 : 35 ] But a real missionary church will be a church where pride is humbled by understanding the sheer privilege of God's grace for everyone in the church.

And proclamation, therefore, will be heartened by understanding the sheer power of God's grace in the gospel for all who are yet outside the church and will yet believe.

A church that truly cherishes the privileges of God's grace to sinners will be a church that confidently proclaims God's grace to sinners.

And so every church, every solid serving church, even like the church here in Rome, needs the gospel. And as we've seen, the first way that the gospel humbles people is that it teaches us about the reality of our own sin.

That God is angry, burning with holy and righteous anger, as chapter 1 verse 18 says, against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

[ 2 : 45 ] All, says Paul. The bad, yes, and the good, and the religious, and even the God-fearing, the Jews, all have exchanged the truth of God for a lie.

Exchanged the glory of the eternal God for idolatry, for anti-God, self-seeking, self-justifying, self-rule.

Or to use the words in our passage this morning, in chapter 3 verse 23, all sinned and lack the glory of God.

None is the glorious image of God that they were created to be. None is righteous. No, not one, says Paul. And those who have the privilege of God's revelation of truth in Scripture, those who have and know the Bible, need to be clear that this is precisely what the Bible itself impresses upon us.

Chapter 3 verses 19 and 20. It is to the Bible people that the Bible speaks. It's for us, says Paul, through the law, through our Bibles, comes what?

[ 3 : 56 ] The knowledge of our sin. It's the Scriptures that silence and slay us. And what a humbling message it's been, hasn't it?

I've sensed, as I'm sure you have, an unusual hush among us in these past weeks, as if the Spirit of God has been pressing us down into the floor together, as we've considered these devastating words.

And so I have been longing, longing for these words that begin our passage today. These great life-changing, world-changing, eternity-changing words.

But now, but now, the righteousness of God has been manifest. The answer, the solution to the terrible weight of our sin.

Friends, let me tell you what I've discovered. The shocking truth is this. The humbling hasn't finished.

[ 5 : 01 ] In fact, it's only just begun. Because what we'll discover is that even more humbling than discovering the depths of the awful reality of our sin is discovering the depths of the awful reality of our salvation.

Because this passage, marvelous as it is, is also meant to leave us floored, just as we find ourselves at the end of chapter 3, verse 19. Paul's explicit.

He says that in verse 27. Where then is boasting? Where is pride? Pride. It's excluded. It's silenced. If you grasp what I'm saying here, he says, you will be back in the dust all over again.

Silence. As far as all human pride is concerned by the sheer grace of God's saving righteousness. And yet at the same time, these same mouths that are firmly shut to any pride and self-righteousness will be unstopped and opened powerfully to proclaim the way of God's righteousness which is for all who believe.

Not just for insiders, but for outsiders. And that's what happens when the church truly grasps and understands the gospel.

[ 6 : 27 ] Paul is not writing these words to give us a systematic theology or to give us a thesis on justification by faith. What he is doing is teaching a real living church the implications of that marvelous doctrine and what it means for the church of Jesus Christ and how the fact that this is the way that God puts sinful people right with himself means that we have a message to take to every single person in every single nation in every continent indeed in the whole world.

That was God's promise from the beginning to Abraham to bless all nations through him. And that's what chapter 4 is going to be all about. But now, says Paul, that saving power, God's saving righteousness has been manifest at last to the whole world.

Chapter 3, verse 21. Through Jesus Christ. For all who believe. All who have faith.

You see what happens. We leave man behind here in verse 21. Man is a disaster as we've seen in chapters 1 to 3. What man has done is deface and destroy himself and his world.

And what he can do to put the situation right is precisely nothing. He is helpless. He is under God's condemnation. He is under sin's power. He is under God's wrath.

[ 8 : 07 ] But now, says Paul, in the Gospel, see what God has done. God's power. At work to accomplish God's purpose in God's way.

See at last what God has been planning all along, promising all along, but now, has made manifest, has been put forward, has been shown, has been demonstrated, has been publicly revealed.

All of these verbs are used here in the great and ultimate revelation of his righteousness. His powerful way of putting all things right forever.

The Gospel is all about God and what he has done and why he has done it and how he has done it and above all, through whom he has done it.

All through Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ and of Jesus Christ. It's all about Jesus Christ. So let's look carefully at these verses then.

[ 9 : 18 ] All about God's righteousness in the face of man's unrighteousness and let's see what Paul tells us that it means. What is this righteousness? Well, first of all, verses 21 to 3, 22 tell us that this revelation of God's righteousness means that it is in Christ alone that God finally manifests the reliability of his promise.

God's saving righteousness is demonstrated in his own faithfulness to his covenant. His promise and all his promises are vindicated in Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ alone.

In Jesus Christ, God is seen publicly to do right in all things that last. Just as he has promised always he would for his people right from the beginning.

In the Old Testament, God's righteousness means his salvation, his rescue according to promise. Listen again to the words from Psalm 98 that we began our service with.

The Lord has made known his salvation. He has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his covenant love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.

[ 10 : 40 ] All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. And what Paul is saying is now all of this has come true at last in its fullest and ultimate sense.

But what is it? It is certainly something that can't just be had by possessing or even by knowing intimately God's commands.

Says verse 21, it's a righteousness that is apart from the law. It's a total misunderstanding to think that possessing the law of God can ever make you right with God.

We've seen that in verse 20. The absolute opposite is true. It's a law that makes absolutely clear our condemnation. Through the law, through God's revelation comes the knowledge of sin and the need for righteousness but not the righteousness that we need.

But at the same time, Paul's not inventing something new, not at all, says verse 21. All the law and the prophets, the whole Old Testament bears witness to this righteousness.

[ 11 : 49 ] If you read the Old Testament, in every place it is promising God's coming righteousness through his Saviour, through the Christ. and it's pointing God's people to the Christ who is to come.

Moses and all the prophets proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ in advance. That's what Jesus himself kept saying. So no, just hearing or having the Bible's morality can't save you.

But yes, hearing the Bible's message most certainly can and will save you. because it witnesses to God's saving righteousness in Christ. Remember 2 Timothy 3 verse 15?

Paul speaks about these sacred writings that are able to make you wise for salvation. How?

Through faith in Jesus Christ. And yes, says Paul here, that's what the Old Testament promised in pointing you to God's promised righteousness.

Well then, through what or through whom is God's saving righteousness manifested?

[ 13 : 01 ] Answer, verse 22, through Jesus Christ. It could be, as the NIV and the ESV translate it here, faith in Jesus Christ.

But actually, it's not the same as that verse we just read in 2 Timothy 3 15, where the in is very clear. Literally, it just says here, by faith of Jesus Christ. That's how the Authorized Version translates it.

I think that is probably more accurate. What it would mean then is through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Scholars differ in their view and argue about this. I'm not sure it matters hugely since either way the emphasis is very clear.

It's through Jesus Christ. Leon Morris says this, faith in Jesus is certainly in mind, but there would be no place for the exercise of faith were it not for the faithfulness of Jesus Christ and for God's faithfulness shown in Jesus Christ.

I think that's quite helpful because in each section of this passage, the focus is clearly on the person of Jesus Christ. Verse 22 here, the faithfulness, the faith of Jesus Christ.

[ 14 : 12 ] Verse 24, the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. Verse 26, God is the justifier of the one literally who is of the faith of Christ.

But however we take that, the point is very clear. Righteousness comes through Jesus Christ and through him alone. Not from the law, but apart from it.

Not by having your Bible or knowing it or teaching it or doing anything else with it other than allowing it to lead you to the feet of Jesus Christ.

And who is this righteousness for? Verse 22, it's for all who believe, all who have faith.

And obviously the object of that faith is Jesus Christ and him alone. Faith in him is the only faith that God commands. Obedient submission to God's righteousness is obedient submission to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 15 : 19 ] None other. What? Is that the way for everyone? Even the very best of us?

Even those who are very religious, very proper, very right? Yes, as Paul, everyone, verse 23, 4, everyone, all sinned and lack the glory of God.

All have exchanged the glory of God for idolatry. All stand condemned utterly. Every mouth is stopped and so rescue, if there can be rescue, righteousness, God's saving power, can come only to those who come empty-handed to God in humble, trusting faith to receive from Jesus Christ.

But, says Paul, God's righteousness, his saving power is manifest now to all through Jesus Christ. His promise hasn't failed despite man's utter faithlessness and unrighteousness.

Despite Israel's terrible faithlessness and unrighteousness. That was a real question, wasn't it, last time, back in verse three. Does God's faithfulness, is it nullified by the faithlessness of his people?

[ 16 : 44 ] Will his promise fail and prove unreliable? Because his people have failed and proved unreliable. No, says Paul in verse four. God will be true and faithful, even though every one of his people is untruthful and unfaithful.

And so he has been, he says here, in Jesus Christ. He was God's true and faithful one.

And through his faithfulness, many will be put right with God. We'll come to something very similar again in chapter five where in verse twelve it says all sinned, in verse nineteen, that through one man's obedience, many, will be made righteous.

Now do you see Paul's point? All God's promises of salvation right from the beginning, all his promises to save man from the crushing curse of sin and rebellion are fulfilled in this ultimate revelation of the way he's going to put everything right, of the way he will reverse the plight of sinful humanity through Jesus Christ and him alone.

quite apart from the law. And that is so, as he says in chapter one, verse sixteen, for the Jew first, the religious one, and also for the Greek, for the total pagan.

[ 18 : 11 ] To everyone who bows the knee in willing surrender to Jesus Christ, in other words, who has faith. To everyone who does that, but only to those who bow the knee to Jesus with the obedience of faith.

Right standing with God comes only to those who are kneeling before Jesus Christ. We're all the same size when we're kneeling before Jesus Christ.

But we need to know more, don't we, about this revelation of God's righteousness. Why does he do it this way? Why does he do it at this time? Why are all God's saving promises and all his saving power focused in this one man, Jesus Christ?

And why must God's writing of all wrongs in the world be done this way? Well, the answer is at the end of the paragraph, the second half of verse 25 to verse 26.

Let me read it again. This was to show God's righteousness. Because in his divine forbearance he has 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 is of the faith of Jesus.

[ 19 : 39 ] It's in Christ alone, says Paul secondly, that God fully demonstrates the rightness of his own person. God's sovereign righteousness is demonstrated in his own faithfulness to his character.

His person is vindicated as the just and holy judge through Jesus Christ and only through Jesus Christ. It's in Jesus Christ that God is seen to be right in all things as he said he has been from the very beginning.

It's absolutely basic, isn't it, to the revelation that God gives us of himself that he is holy and true and righteous and just. That he is right. Will not the judge of all the earth do right, said Abraham?

Axiomatic, of course he will. And that's why God warns his people through Moses in Exodus 23 verse 7, keep far from a false charge, do not kill the innocent, for I will not acquit the wicked.

Proverbs 17 for example, he who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord.

[ 21 : 00 ] God is the sovereign God who will judge the whole world in righteousness. We were reminded of that in verse 6 of chapter 3 last time. But God has a problem.

He seems to be unjust. very, very often in this world, doesn't he? Even among his own people. Why do the wicked prosper? Why do the godly so often suffer?

Those questions fill the Psalms. How long, O Lord, until we see this just judgment of yours upon wickedness?

That's a problem, isn't it? You can't have a judge who is just in theory, but unjust in practice. Justice must be done, and it must be seen to be done.

But verse 25 says, God had in his forbearance passed over sins, ignored them it seems. not only had terrible wickedness in the world not been judged publicly by God, but also he had passed over many, many sins of the saints as well.

[ 22 : 21 ] Men like Abraham and David and countless others who were sinners, clearly, publicly, bigamists, polygamists, adulterers, murderers. And these people, some of them God had called his friends.

To use the shocking phrase of chapter 4 verse 5, he justified the ungodly.

The God who says, I will not acquit the wicked, has done precisely that in the sight of all the world. How can that possibly be just? How can that possibly be right?

Imagine the outcry of a judge who just passes over the crimes, the terrible crimes of criminals and acquits the guilty.

There's outrage when that happens, and rightly so, as there is when a judge gives too light a sentence, or when there's any denial of real justice.

[ 23 : 25 ] And God looks very like he is unjust, unrighteous. and so Paul says in verse 26, his saving righteousness is revealed in this way to show at the present time and once and for all, that he is just, righteous, right, and, or perhaps even though, he is the justifier, the one who declares righteous, who declares in right standing with himself, who acquits not, notice, verse 26, not every human being, not all the ungodly, but the one who is of the faith of Jesus.

Again, it could be, as our ESV translates it, the one who believes in Jesus. It certainly is the one who believes in Jesus. I think the point here is to show that the person God is right and is shown to be right to justify is the one whose whole status before God is as a result of what Jesus has done, not what he himself has done.

It seems, I think, to be the very opposite of chapter 3, verse 20, which literally says the one of the works of the law will never be justified, but here the one of the faithfulness of Jesus will be declared right and will be seen to be rightly declared right, rightly acquitted by God, so that God himself will be utterly vindicated as right and just in all his judgments.

And you see what Paul is saying. He is saying that God's saving salvation, his righteousness, is revealed in Christ alone, yes, as the answer to man's problem with God, his condemnation for sin, but also, and even more importantly, it's the answer to God's problem with man.

You see, in any broken relationship, there are two parties involved, and both parties are estranged, and peace cannot be, reconciliation cannot be, until both sides of that estrangement are dealt with.

[ 25 : 56 ] And so it is with man and God. And as James Denny puts it, there is something in God as well as something in man which has to be dealt with before there can be peace.

And the something in God's side, he says, is so incomparably more serious that in comparison with it, the thing on man's side, simply passes out of view.

And God's problem, friends, is that he is just, he is righteous, and he is right to be angry with man's sin and rebellion and rejection of him.

And as verse 26 says, he must not only be seen to be just, he must be just. And that means he must punish sin.

But how can that possibly be so then? How can God possibly be the justifier, the acquitter of the ungodly, the wicked, the unrighteous, and yet be righteous?

[ 27 : 18 ] How can God be both merciful and just? How can he possibly both forgive and yet still be fair and true to his character?

It's not just enough, is it, that God should be shown to be the God who pardons sins. He must also be shown to be a God who truly and rightly punishes sins.

And to be true to himself, to be just and right and holy in his person, he must truly punish sin. See, unless God is right and truly does punish evil, how could he possibly be a God worth knowing and loving and serving?

Would you want to know a deeply uncorrupt judge who spent his time letting off heinous criminals? If God were not that, how could God be God at all?

How could the universe remain in motion? We know that utter lawlessness, utter lack of justice leads to total anarchy, chaos, destruction.

[ 28 : 36 ] Surely then, God cannot be merciful to the guilty. It just isn't right. But no, says Paul, in Christ, and in Christ alone, God shows how he can do both.

To be just and the justifier, to be right and the one who declares right and acquits the one who is of faith. How?

Well, the heart of our paragraph begins and ends, as it does, with a double affirmation of God's righteousness. The heart of this paragraph holds the answer.

It's the very heart of God's saving righteousness. His glorious, saving, humbling righteousness. To the very heart of the Christian gospel, friends.

These verses, the second half of verse 24 and 25, they tell us how in Christ Jesus, and through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, God's righteousness answers both the plight of guilty man under the power of sin, sin, and the problem of a good God who must punish sin.

[ 30 : 05 ] It's in these verses, these wonderful and terrible verses that Paul tells us, thirdly, that it's in Christ alone that God fearfully achieves the rescue of his people.

God's amazing sacrificial righteousness is demonstrated in his own faithfulness to his cross. His people are vindicated.

They are declared right with God through Jesus Christ and through him alone because in Jesus Christ and in his death alone sin's penalty is vindicated.

It is paid. And God is seen to put all things right at last as he promised. And God the just is satisfied because sin is punished properly and publicly and powerfully and permanently through Jesus Christ alone.

Look carefully at these momentous words. For those who believe says Paul there is no distinction for verse 23 all sinned and lack the glory of God verse 24 and are justified by his grace and as a gift.

[ 31 : 39 ] Justified declared right acquitted where we stood condemned in verse 19 of our guilt. And it's all he says by sheer grace as a gift doubly emphasized.

It's a free pardon by God the judge himself. It is utterly gratuitous. What man could not do God has done. How?

How does this happen? It's through says Paul the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. See again just as verse 22 this salvation is only through Jesus Christ.

But here we're told more. It's a redemption in Christ Jesus. That's a picture from the slave market. To redeem is to buy out to set free through the payment of a price a ransom price.

And Paul is saying that believers are justified. They're put in the right with God. They're freed from sin's condemnation because they are set free from sin's power and authority and control.

[ 32 : 55 ] They're liberated through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus which is all the doing of God's marvelous grace. My friends, uppermost in Paul's mind as he writes these words must be the great redemption of the Old Testament scriptures.

The redemption of God's people from the oppressive power of Egypt that liberated the descendants of Jacob to become the free people of God, God's Israel, the sons of God, bound to him as they were by the great covenant at Sinai.

Remember God's words in Exodus 6, I am the Lord, the God of the covenant promises and I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm, I will be your God and I will bring you into the promised land.

A marvelous sovereign rescue from God. But remember how it happened? They were rescued through a mighty act of God's judgment.

I will redeem you, says God, with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. the ransom price of the great redemption was the death of the firstborn in every single household in the land of Egypt.

[ 34 : 21 ] Everyone. I will strike the firstborn in the land, both man and beast, says the Lord. And he did.

And we are told there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house, not one house, where someone was not dead. Every house judged by God?

Yes, every house. A universal act of God's judgment. But wasn't judgment avoided by the chosen people?

No. Judgment was not avoided. Blood was shed in every single house. Death touched every single house and missed, not one.

But where his people had heeded his saving promise of salvation and kept the Lord's Passover in obedient faith, the death penalty, the blood shed, was not their blood, but instead was the blood of the Lamb.

[ 35 : 43 ] And when the angel of God's judgment saw on the doorposts the blood of the sacrificial Lamb, he passed by. Not because death had been averted in that house, but because death had already been executed in that house.

because God's judgment had already fallen. Because his wrath was already spent in the death of the Lamb that God himself had provided as a substitute.

And so the liberation, the redemption of God's people was for them a wonderful Passover.

But it came at a great, great price, the death of another whose blood literally turned away the judging anger of God, the angel of death, because the penalty in that place had already been paid. the blood of the Lamb turned away, propitiated the holy, righteous, destroying wrath of God, the judge of all the earth.

[ 37 : 09 ] And says Paul, in the great redemption from the oppressive power of sin, for those who trust in God's promises in Jesus, he is the one whom God put forward as a propitiation in his flood.

Verse 25, he bore the real punishment of his people's sin, so that the penalty had been paid already for those who shelter in his household, as it were.

And so that God, the righteous judge, is satisfied. his pardon is not without price. It has been bought at a terrible price.

The price of his own blood, his own death. And so he is the righteous judge. He does terribly and truly he punishes sin.

but he is also the righteouser, the merciful one, who forgives sins rightly and declares his people reconciled and right with him forever.

[ 38 : 27 ] Now friends, people often object to this whole notion of God's real anger at sin and the whole idea of Jesus' death as somehow paying for sin and saving us from God's wrath.

But I hope that you can see that unless we take out our scissors and cut these words out of our Bibles, there's no getting away from it. That is what these words mean.

They do not mean anything else but that. And if we did cut these out, then the whole problem of man that we have before the wrath of God that Paul begins this whole letter with, the whole problem is yet to be solved.

We're still under God's wrath. But no, this is the heart of God's revelation of his righteousness. It's the awful reality of our salvation that for God to save his people, for God to be true to his own covenant and to his own character, he must carry his own cross.

He must provide a propitiation. And this he did in putting forward Christ Jesus, his own son, as a propitiation in his blood.

[ 39 : 53 ] Notice, it says God put him forward. There's no thought whatsoever here of a merciful Jesus trying to propitiate a vengeful and an angry God.

Not at all. It's God himself, says Paul, who took on the flesh of man in the person of his son to substitute himself in the place of his people and to bear himself the full weight of the punishment of his people's sin.

It's God's doing, says Paul, and he did it all for us. It's almost impossible to understand this fully and every single illustration that you've ever heard is utterly inadequate.

There are some things that can help us. First of all, it's just to remember that love and anger are not incompatible. Some people sometimes say, God is love, how could he possibly pour out wrath on Jesus?

Well, if you read 1 John chapter 4, where we are told that verse, God is love, we're then told immediately the very definition of that love. This is love, says John, that God sent his son to be a propitiation for our sins.

[ 41 : 10 ] But we all know that love and anger can go together. Indeed, they must go together. If you love your child, you'll be angry when they show cruelty and dreadful, wicked behaviour, and you must punish them for their own good.

But you also know, don't you, as a parent, that in punishing them, you also will suffer. Don't you find that? It's restorative, it's remedial, it's necessary for them, but it costs you.

It just gives us a sense, doesn't it? That we bear in ourselves something of our own wrath, just because we do love. another thing to recognize, if we're to understand how a punishment upon a substitute can be just and can be proper, and not some kind of legal fiction, as some people try and say.

Another thing we have to understand there is the principle of representative punishment. When an ambassador is expelled from a country, that government is punishing that whole nation by expelling the ambassador, isn't it?

Or maybe more down to earth, think of a football team, whose fans misbehave and riot, and the punishment is brought down from the football association upon the team.

[ 42 : 33 ] The team has got points from its place in the league, and as the team is punished, so all the supporters are punished in the team's punishment. Take that just a step further.

Imagine the president of the football league, who passes down the sentence to the club's manager, says this, you will be docked 12 points in the league. The manager replies, well, we'll not be in Europe next year then.

We'll lose all our TV income. We'll lose vast amounts of gate receipts. So be it. says the president. This behavior cannot go unpunished.

But sir, then the club will go bankrupt. We won't be able to pay our debts. Yes, that is so, alas. But it cannot change the judgment.

It must be punished. But sir, says the manager, you are the owner of this football club.

[ 43 : 42 ] Yes, he says. Yes, I am. And so this is going to cost me everything that I have. I'll need to sell everything else that I own to pay for this club's debts.

But on my honor as the president of the football league, this club must be punished. debt. And yet, so that this club may be saved, I myself will personally bear all the weight of the penalty.

I will pay the crushing debt. debt. And so says Paul, God in the person of his son paid it all that he might be just.

The just and honorable punisher of sin. And the justifier. The just partner of sins.

Of all those whose righteousness is through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. It's still possible, of course, to sneer at this truth.

[ 44 : 57 ] To pervert it. To desperately misunderstand it. I remember the first chapter of Billy Connolly's biography is full of bitterness about the guilt-inducing Catholic upbringing he had.

The title of the chapter is Jesus is dead and it's all your fault. But how different is the true message of the gospel?

It's as Martin Luther said, that God loved us even as he hated us for his sins, for our sins. And that he so loved that he set forth his own son to be the propitiation for our sins.

To bear the punishment for our sins that we might be brought to peace with him despite our sins.

And our part in all of this, summed up there in the words in our ESV in the middle of verse 25, we simply receive it by faith.

Literally that just says simply through faith. faith. And it may indeed refer again to Christ's faithfulness even unto death. But certainly that English phrase there utterly sums up the whole of what Paul is saying in these verses.

[ 46 : 14 ] It is all about what God has done and it is nothing whatsoever about what we have done. All there is for us is to receive this pardon, to receive this righteousness as a free gift of God's grace, says verse 24.

It's for those, says verse 22, who believe, who have faith. What's faith? It's simply obeying God's call, receiving with empty hands this gift of God's free grace.

whoever we are, whatever we've done. Look down to verse 30. God is one, says Paul, and he will justify the circumcised, the insider, by faith, and the uncircumcised, the outsider, by the same faith. There's no other way to be right with God than to submit humbly to receive God's gift of grace in Christ Jesus. Jesus. Doesn't that sound so easy?

And yet, friends, it is the hardest thing, isn't it, in this whole world to do. We resist grace, because we hate to be seen with empty hands, with nothing in them.

[ 47 : 43 ] We find that, don't we, when we receive gifts or receive hospitality. I must do the same again for them. Isn't that right? We don't like to feel that we're in somebody's debt, because it humbles us.

Oh dear, he spent so much more on that present than I did on him. To be a receiver is to be under the power of the giver, of grace.

How much more then, with the amazing gift of God's infinite grace, when we know the cost, the terrible, infinite cost of his gift to us.

And so, friends, the scriptures that slay us and silence us, as we grasp the sheer enormity of our sin, are the scriptures that lead us to a Savior God, who saves us and yet silences us, as we grasp the sheer enormity of our salvation.

And that must mean, mustn't it, that in a church that understands the gospel of Christ, there can be no conceited Christians, because all pride and all positioning is slain when you understand the extraordinary privilege of the grace of God made known in Christ to me, a sinner.

[ 49 : 10 ] What I am and what I have is all of God and his grace, all through Christ, given for me, and nothing, nothing to do with me or what I am or what I have or what I can offer.

No conceited Christians. But there will surely be confident Christians who know the extraordinary power of God's grace in Christ and who know that the gospel that we proclaim is all of God, all through Christ, for all who believe, a real saving power for insiders and outsiders, for the religious and for the total pagan, for the likely candidates for the gospel and for the most unlikely candidate in all this universe.

Why do we need these verses from Paul in Romans 3, 21 to 26? We need them, friends, because only a church that cherishes the privilege of God's grace to sinners will be a church that confidently proclaims God's grace to sinners.

And that's what we're here for. Let's pray. Oh God, our Father, help us to understand it.

Help us to take it in, what it meant to you, the Holy One, to take away our sin. For Christ, your Savior's sake.

[ 50 : 57 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.