

Romans Chapter 3 v 9 - 31

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Welcome. It's good to see you here this morning. Good to welcome folk from Sheffield and Leicester and other places as well. Trust that together we might know the Lord's nearness and his help. Now, I wonder how you feel this morning. What do you, how do you feel in yourselves? Perhaps you feel like you've had a good week. Perhaps you feel like you've had a really hard and difficult week. But the wonderful truth is, as we read there up on the screen from Romans 8 verse 1, that no matter how we feel about ourselves, no matter how we think about ourselves, the wonderful thing is if we are in Christ, if we have put our faith and trust in him, then we are not condemned by God. Though we've failed, though we've got it wrong, God looks upon us and accepts us because of what Jesus has done. We are accepted in Christ. We are loved in Christ.

We are forgiven in Christ. Whatever we think or feel about ourselves, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And because it's Jesus who's done it all, not because we're good, not because we are perfect, not because we never get it wrong, but because of Jesus and all that he's done for us in his life and death upon the cross. And because even this morning he is Lord of all, ruling and reigning in heaven, we can sing Christ triumphant, ever reigning. Let's stand and sing 305 in our hymn books. Let's bring our worship to God in the assurance of sins forgiven.

305 in our hymn books. Let's pray together now. Let's come to God in prayer.

O Lord our God, our Heavenly Father, we praise you and thank you that for those who have trusted in Jesus. There is no condemnation. There is no judgment that we fear. We can come to you, the living and holy God, yes, aware that we are sinners and aware that we fail and are lawbreakers, but aware and certain that our sins have been forgiven. All our failings, all our mistakes, all our rebellion has been covered up. And that Lord, O God, you see us and you love us and you receive us and that you will never ever leave us nor turn us away or reject us. And O Lord, we thank you that this is indeed only because of Jesus. Yes, he is triumphant now. Yes, he is seated in glory in heaven now. Yes, he is the one who is Lord of all, awaiting that day, looking and working to that day when he comes again in glory and honor and power. But that hasn't always been the case.

Though your son was for eternity that perfect second person of the Godhead, yet in time he took upon himself human nature. In time he was born into this world just as we've been born into this world.

[3 : 18] Lord, he lived amongst us. He ministered, he spoke, he taught, but he was rejected. He was despised. He was forsaken. He was counted as being wicked and nailed to a cross and murdered and put to death. He suffered and died and was buried. But Lord, we know that that death upon the cross, that suffering he endured was not because of anything in himself, not because of anything bad or wicked or sinful, for he is the only person who's ever lived that sinful, righteous, law-keeping life. But he died for us in our place, our substitute. Lord Jesus, when you cried out from the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

It was because there in that dark moment in time, you endured hell itself to rescue us so that we might never taste of hell, so that we might be, oh Lord, alive forevermore. We thank you that there you took the punishment we deserved and you did it only and purely because of love for us, not because of anything we have done or could do or ever will do to deserve such love.

We thank you that though you were buried, you did not stay dead in the grave, but you rose again on the third day and that you are alive to pour out into our lives the accomplishments of your death and resurrection. You are alive forevermore, our living and great Redeemer. And we can trust you and we can come to you and we can worship you and praise you and, oh Lord, we can meet with you. And that's our desire this morning, to meet with you, our God. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to meet with you as we come to worship and praise, as we come to hear your word read and

preached, as we come to call upon you in prayer. Lord, we long that by your Spirit you would be at work in our lives, in our midst, that you would be the one who reveals to us and shows us more of your beauty, more of your glory, more of your great salvation. Help us then, give us right and prepared hearts and minds to meet with you. And Lord, we ask that you would bless us and do us good, for we know that is your great desire. And we ask these things all in and through the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Let's turn together in our Bibles to Romans and chapter 3. Romans and chapter 3, and we're going to read from verse 9 to the end of the chapter. So Romans 3, verse 9. If you've got one of the church Bibles, that's page 1130. 1130. And the aforementioned Mr. and Mrs. Jackson-to-be are here, so it's lovely to have them with us, Miriam and David. And David's got most of his hair still, which is a good sign, though Frederick's is fast evaporating.

So do pray for them, and we'll pray for them in a moment. Pray for them in the preparations for the wedding. It's less than two weeks away, and we would look forward to that joyful occasion. Also to remind you that on the 21st of October, we're planning to have an adult baptism service here. And if you're thinking about baptism, if you're a Christian, you're thinking about that, then please have a chat to myself sometime in the next few weeks. So let's read God's Word, page 1130, Romans chapter 3, and reading from verse 9.

[7 : 16] What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all. For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin. As it is written, there is no one righteous, not even one. There's no one who understands. There is no one who seeks God.

All have turned away. They have together become worthless. There is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves. Their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips.

Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. Ruin and misery mark their ways. And the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law. Rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. He did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Where then is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works?

[9 : 32] No, because of the law that requires faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith, apart from the works of the law. Or is God the God of the Jew only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too?

Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we then nullify the law by this faith? Not at all. Rather, we uphold the law.

Have a Bible to handle. I'd encourage you to have a Bible to handle, to share with somebody next to you. Turn back to Romans and chapter 3. We're not going to be solely in that chapter. We're going to be in several parts of Romans this morning, but that should be clear, I hope, as we go on. Now, last Sunday we began thinking about the five truths that were rediscovered by the reformers in the 16th century, beginning with Martin Luther. And each one of those five truths was a return to the source of Christianity. It wasn't that they were discovering something new. It wasn't some radical new teaching that they were bringing about, but it was a rediscovery of what had been lost for centuries in the church, the teachings of the New Testament. And that's why last week we looked at that Latin phrase, sola scriptura, meaning scripture alone. Each of these five pillars, these truths, the reformers put into Latin because that was the language, as it were, of the theology of the day.

Sola scriptura, scripture alone. And it was their belief, and therefore it's our belief too, that the Bible has the sole authority over the life of a Christian. What God has written in the word in the Bible is plain, it is understandable, it is clear for all who want to know God's will, all who approach it with a right heart, seeking to know what God is saying. But Martin Luther didn't always think that way about the Bible. In fact, like all of us, he saw the Bible as a very dark book.

[11 : 51] He saw the Bible as something hard to understand. He only had, at this time, a Latin translation called the Vulgate, from the word vulgar, the common language, the Latin. And it didn't always help him in its translation. And there was one verse particular which baffled him, confused him, and troubled him. And if you turn back a page to Romans chapter 1, it's verse 17. Romans 1 verse 17.

Now, when Luther read it, he read the word justice in the place of righteousness. So I'm going to read it as he would have read it and understood it. For in the gospel, the justice of God is revealed, a justice that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, the just will live by faith.

And the word justice and righteousness are interchangeable, they're very much the same thing. But he took that word justice, the justice of God. And this is what he wrote about his attitude to that verse. I hated that word, justice of God, which I'd been taught to understand as that justice of God by which God is just and by which he punishes sinners and the unjust. I hated the just God who punishes sinners. In silence, if I did not blaspheme, then certainly I grumbled vehemently and got angry at God. I said, why does God heap sorrow upon sorrow through the gospel and through the gospel threaten us with his justice and wrath? Luther struggled for years with these thoughts, believing that God not only condemns us through the law, but also through the gospel which is translated good news. Where was the good news in the justice of God being revealed in the gospel? And so, as we thought, we were looking at those slides a bit earlier, he tried harder than ever to make himself righteous before God. He went to extreme lengths to gain some peace in his heart that God accepted him and considered him good enough.

Now, Luther was a faithful son of the church. That's how he described himself. And he was faithful to the Catholic teachings that he'd received. Those teachings were this, that sin was within a person like a disease that needed healing. So that if you did good things, if you obeyed the requirements of the Catholic church through penance and through lots of good works and seeing the relics and all the things, you could heal the sin in your heart and somehow get better and better and ultimately become righteous before God. Luke kept meditating and thinking and wrestling with this verse and this phrase, in the gospel a righteousness or justice of God is revealed. And this is what he said several years later. At last, by the mercy of God, I began to understand that in this verse, the justice of God is that by which the just person lives by a gift of God that is faith. The justice of God is a passive justice by which the merciful God justifies us by faith. As it is written, the just shall live by faith.

All at once, I felt I'd been born again and entered into paradise. Immediately, I saw the whole of the Bible in a different light. I exalted this sweetest word, the justice of God, with as much love as before I had hated it with hate. Luther had at last grasped that a person was made righteous, not by what they did, not by keeping the law or by keeping the commandments of the church, but they were made right with God by faith alone. And so the second truth, the second declaration of Luther and the others was sola fide, faith alone. Well, that's enough history. You're probably thinking, what does that mean for us?

[16 : 04] What does that mean for us this morning? Why does this rediscovery of faith alone, sola fide, why is it so important? Why does it matter? And does it matter at all? Well, it's this truth that we are saved by faith alone that sets apart Bible Christianity from every other form of religion in the world. Every form of belief in the world declares that to be right with God or to find peace or to get to heaven or whatever it may be, you have to do certain things. Even Catholicism, then and now, and other forms of Christianity, sadly, teach that we need not just faith, but we need good works, good deeds, to be good people.

The Bible word for being right with God is a word justification. If you turn back to chapter 3, where we read, we read not the word justification, but words similar to it. Verse 24, all are justified. And then later on, verse 28, we maintain a person is justified. Verse 30, God who will justify. So this word justification is the word. Now we understand what it means when somebody justifies themselves, don't we? Or he's just justifying himself, or they're trying to justify themselves. It means that a person is said to justify their actions or justify their words.

They're trying to explain that what they have done was the right thing to do in the circumstances, or the right word to say in the circumstances. They're trying to make us accept their actions, accept their words as being right and good and acceptable. But justification with God is different. Justification with God is very different. I want us to imagine that standing in a court of law, with God as the sole judge over our lives, all our crimes, all our sins, all of our failings, all of our evil thoughts, are brought before God, and now we're awaiting a verdict from him, a judgment from God. Will he declare us guilty or not guilty? And justification is this, God declaring us not guilty. That's his judgment, and we are set free. Justification is to be declared by God as righteous, declared by God as acceptable. It's not a change of nature within. We don't become good people. We don't become suddenly transformed miraculously, or even over a period of time to be good people. Justification is an announcement. It's a change of our status, change of our relationship with God. It's how God views us, how he deals with us, how he looks upon us. He announces, you are forgiven. Now the question is this, how can that be just? How can that be right? How can a righteous God, a just God, declare sinful people who have broken his commandments, who've lived lives in rebellion and against him, and have hurt and harmed others? How can a just and right God declare sinful people not guilty without becoming unjust himself? We've seen it in the papers. We've read it in the news. We've seen how a judge has been castigated because there has been a terrible crime committed, and the person before him has got off with no sentence at all, or somehow there's been a miscarriage of justice, and instead of that person who was guilty, being found guilty, there was a technicality that their lawyer found in the law, which got them off scot-free, and people are up in arms. This is unjust. This isn't right. This person's clearly murdered or killed or did this terrible act. [20 : 06] How can they be set free? Well, how can they be set free? How can we who are unrighteous become righteous when there's nothing in us that's good? There's nothing in us that's right? Remember, we read there earlier in chapter 3, verse 10, this incredible declaration of God's word from the Psalms.

As it is written, in other words, as God has said, there is no one righteous, not even one. Later on, verse 12, there is no one who does good, not even one. It doesn't mean that everything we do is bad.

It doesn't mean that every single person in the world only does bad things, but what it means is this, none of us have done what is right before God. None of us have kept God's good laws, followed his commandments, have lived lives which are without sin. All of us have. So how is it possible we, who are bad, guilty, can possibly be declared by God not guilty, forgiven? Well, it's only possible through faith, and through faith in Jesus Christ. Several verses elsewhere in the Bible explain this.

Later on, Paul writes in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, God made him, that's Jesus, who had no sin, to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Later on in 2 Peter, Peter writes, for Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God. An exchange has taken place, a swap. We are justified by good works, but not our good works, Jesus' good works. He is the perfect, the righteous one. He paid for our justification. He paid the penalty. He took the punishment by his life and especially his death. And so what do we read here in chapter 3 of Romans in verse 21? Now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify. The Old Testament speaks about this righteousness, being right with God, apart from doing good works. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. This righteousness is given. It's not our righteousness.

It's not something that belongs to us, that we have to sort of earn and build up, like our savings in the bank account. It's something which is, the Bible says, imputed to us, given to us, credited to us. [23 : 00] Later on, just turn a page to Romans 4 and verse 23. Paul is using the example of what happened to Abraham, who's often called the father of the faith, one of the very first believers who trusted in God.

The words, it was credited to him, were not written for him alone. Abraham was credited as righteous by God because he believed. Those words, it was credited to him, were not written for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness, for us who believe in him, who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. God has paid into your bank account Jesus's righteousness. We were bankrupt before God, spiritually speaking. In the bank account of goodness, in the bank account of righteousness of pleasing God, we were bankrupt and in serious debt. But Jesus paid our debts and transferred his perfect righteousness into our account. It is his righteousness, but

God gives it to us and counts it as belonging to us because it's paid, in that sense, imputed to us. How did this happen? How did this happen? How is it possible for Jesus's righteousness to become ours? How can a debt-ridden sinner ever be justified like this? Well, that's when we come back to sola fide.

It's only by faith. And not just any sort of faith. People talk about faith as a sort of a strange thing. Well, everybody has faith. That's true. We all believe in something. But faith is much more than just believing in something. It's got to be specific faith. It's got to be a singular faith, that faith which is in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Perhaps you didn't notice it, but as we read through that passage in Romans 3, this whole matter of faith keeps coming up again and again and again.

[25 : 08] Romans 3, 22. Righteousness is given through faith. Verse 25. To be received by faith. Verse 26.

So as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. Verse 28. We maintain that a person is justified by faith, apart from the works of the law. Verse 30. Do we then nullify the law by this faith? Sorry, verse 30 rather. God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. Then over the page, chapter 4, 24. Also for us to whom God will credit righteousness for us who believe in him. Faith, faith, faith, faith is the simple answer. We can contribute nothing to our salvation. We can give nothing to God that somehow makes us right in his sight. There's nothing we can bring to the table. There's nothing that we can add to. We don't pay into our own bank account from our own goodness. Some people have that idea, don't they, that when we come and stand before God, there's going to be like these pair of scales. On one scale is the bad things we've done. On one scale, the good things we've done. If we've done enough good things, then the scales will topple in our favour. That's not the case. We've got nothing to bring. All we've got is a pair of scales. All our wicked sins are there. The scales are completely down there. We're left high and dry.

But Jesus' good works, Jesus' faithfulness, Jesus' obedience, Jesus' death far outweighs anything that we've done. And so in the sight of God, we are righteous. Faith is simply taking hold of Jesus. It's simply receiving what he has done on our behalf. This is what Luther wrote. If faith is not without all, in other words, if faith is not completely and utterly just faith, even the smallest works, it does not justify. Indeed, it is not even faith. To have any faith in ourselves, to be right with God, is to have no faith in Jesus. To have any faith in what we have done, is to say that what Jesus has done is not enough and our faith is not in him. This sola fide, this faith alone, is the essential to our salvation. It's essential to our peace of heart, day by day, essential to our Christian lives. Why? Why is faith alone so imperative for us to understand? Why am I banging on about it?

Why does Paul bang on about it here? You see, the trouble is, every day you and I sin. We still sin. We're justified and declared by God as not guilty, but we still sin. And whenever we sin, there's a doubt that creeps into our minds. It says this, does God still accept me? Does God still please with me?

[28 : 22] I've sinned against God. Does that mean that in the future God will leave me? Paul concludes his explanation about justification when he gets to chapter 5 and verse 1, and it says this, therefore, since we've been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have peace, a peace which is permanent and unchanging because our justification is based on the finished and completed work of Jesus. You see, if we keep thinking that it's up to me and what I've done, then when we sin, of course, then immediately we're doubting whether God will accept us anymore.

Immediately we're thrown into a place of doubt and discomfort and lack of peace. But God has declared, God has proclaimed, God has said, you are forgiven. You are righteous. It's a done deal. It's a completed and irreversible act which cannot be affected by the good things we do or the bad things that we do.

Everybody in the world wants to prove themselves, don't they? All of us. All people are striving for the acceptance of others. We want people to think that we are great or good or special. We want people to justify us, to accept us, to acknowledge us that we are good people or whatever it may be. And just like Luther of old, people will go to extreme lengths to get the acceptance or the praise or the honor or the justification of other people.

Through their careers, through the possessions that they can amount, through the size of their bank balance or their car, by the awards or the notification that they get. People are searching, searching, seeking.

I want to be accepted. I want to be justified. I want to be thought well of. But like Luther, they never, ever, ever find peace. It's always got to be something else added to that.

[30 : 37] They've always got to jump that little bit higher or that little bit further or win that little bit more money or whatever it may be. They never, ever know that peace that comes by faith alone in Jesus.

So no matter how much we fail, no matter how much we feel bad about ourselves, God's word stands unchanged. We are justified. Now, some of you may be thinking, if you're not sleeping, if it depends upon my faith alone, what happens when my faith has doubts?

If I'm saved by faith alone, what happens when my faith fails? Perhaps in the future things will happen to me and my faith will crumble and weaken and I'll lose my faith.

Perhaps I'll become ill in my mind as I get older and unable to declare my faith. If I'm justified by faith, doesn't a loss of faith mean a loss of justification?

Not at all. Not at all. Remember that your justification and mine is because of what Christ has accomplished, what Christ has done by his life and death.

[31 : 55] That's finished. That's completed. That's absolutely perfect. As we read here, Jesus' resurrection guarantees that we are justified forever.

Just that verse before, chapter 5, verse 1, that immediate verse says this, he, Jesus, was delivered over to death for our sins, that's the forgiveness of our sins completely, and he was raised to life for our justification.

Jesus is alive, and because Jesus is alive, then we are justified. It means that the price paid for our sin was accepted by God.

And to prove it, God said, there's no longer any sin to pay for. Therefore, death could not hold Jesus. Life had to be restored. It's not the ongoing strength of our faith.

It's our status before God. God doesn't change. His declaration, his word, his truth, doesn't alter.

[33 : 05] His feelings don't go up and down towards us. Though our faith and our faithfulness vary from day to day and week to week, though at times we struggle with doubts, and though at times we find ourselves under pressure, our salvation is only and completely upon Christ.

And that means we have hope for the future too. It's not just about having peace today. It means that we have certain hope for the future too. Here in Romans chapter 5 and verse 9, since we have now been justified by his blood, it's done deal, it's done and sorted out.

How much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him? What's he talking about? Well, he's talking about what the Bible declares again and again. There is a day of God's wrath, a day of God's judgment to come, when every single person who's ever lived must stand before Jesus the judge.

Paul writes about this truth in 2 Timothy 4.1, in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead. The day of judgment's a reality.

It's an absolute certainty. It's coming. It can't be avoided. But for those who are already justified, we know that what Christ's verdict will be ahead of time.

[34 : 28] Yes, we shall all be judged, the living and the dead. You and I will stand before him. But dear friends, we are those who have already been told by the judge, when you stand before me, I'm going to declare you not guilty.

When you stand before me, I'm going to declare you justified. When you stand before me, it's as if we've had that intimate relationship with the judge. We know exactly what he's going to say. We know that we have nothing to fear, nothing to be afraid of, nothing to be anxious about.

But what about those who are trusting in their own goodness? What about those who are trying by their lives to do good enough things with the hope that maybe perhaps they'll squeeze into heaven, somehow God will sort of turn a blind eye or just let them off the hook or deal with them gently.

There's no hope, is there? There's no certainty. There's no confidence. There's no assurance. For them, that day of judgment is a terror, a trembling, awful terror. They are locked, as it were, in the cells beneath the court and they are awaiting that call up to stand before the judge and they know in their heart of hearts the judge is going to show them all their sins and the evil things they've done and they know that there can only be one verdict and that verdict is take them down.

Where's your faith this morning? If you have confidence in yourself, then you're lost. If you're somebody who's sitting there this morning and saying, look, when I look at my life there's nothing in me that I can point to that says, what a good boy am I.

[36 : 11] I've got no confidence in myself. I know my own heart. I know my own selfishness. I've got no confidence and hope that somehow I can justify myself before God.

my only confidence, my only hope is in Jesus. Then you are on the safest, securest, most certain foundation and ground of life.

Nothing can change that. Nothing can affect that. Nothing can take that away from you. He is your only hope. Then you have great hope. He's the only one you're depending on.

Then you have complete confidence. You are safe. You are saved. You can look to that day when he comes and when you stand before him as the judge with absolute assurance that he will speak to you.

Come and enter into the joy of your Lord. Faith alone. In Christ alone.

[37 : 09] Let's pray together. Let's pray together. Amen. Our loving Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you that as you look upon us each and every heart, every life, you see us all the same, all have sinned and fallen short.

You see us all as those who are undeserving of your mercy and grace. You see us all as those who really only deserve eternal judgment and damnation.

And yet, Lord, we thank you that as you look upon every heart, you see that there are some who are different. Some who are different, not in themselves, not in what they've done, not because they're good, not because they're religious.

But you see some, O Lord, who are justified. Some, O Lord, upon whom you've declared and given that pardon and assurance and you did that only because of faith, only, simply, purely, by faith.

Not because of anything that they'd done, anything that they had achieved or accomplished. It wasn't because they'd had some great brain to understand these things beyond others. And you do see others, others here this morning who are still in their sin, who are still, as it were, wearing upon them that banner of condemnation, who still knowing that they must face you and to face you is more fearful than death itself.

[38 : 55] And Lord, my prayer is this, that those who are trusting in themselves would abandon all trust and all hope and throw themselves into the very lifeboat of Jesus, the Savior of sinners, that they might find in him all the peace that cannot be found in anything else and the hope and the confidence.

I pray for those who already are justified and declared right with you, but Lord, they doubt it, they feel themselves to be so unworthy, undeserving, they feel themselves to be so far away at times and full of doubts and fears.

Lord, I pray for them that this confidence, this assurance that they are yours and you are theirs forever and ever may be sealed upon their minds and hearts, that they may not fear or be afraid, but be absolutely certain that Jesus is their Savior and their only hope and trust.

And so, Lord, we pray that you would take us on and lead us on into the wonder and the beauty and the glory of our salvation in Christ that we might forever more gaze with joy upon Jesus and all that he's done for us.

Amen.