

Romans Chapter 3

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, just before the children leave, perhaps you could turn to Psalm 14. Psalm 14. If you look at Psalm 53, you'll find it almost identical to Psalm 14, and it also occurs in the passage that I'm going to be looking at later.
- And this, in a way, sets the scene for that passage. So Psalm 14. The fool says in his heart, There is no God.
- They are corrupt, their deeds are vile. There's no one who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.
- All have turned away. All have become corrupt. There's no one who does good, not even one. Do all these evildoers know nothing?
- They devour my people as though eating bread. They never call on the Lord. But there they are, overwhelmed with dread, for God is present in the company of the righteous.
- [1 : 1 7] You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor, but the Lord is their refuge. Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion. Amen.
- When the Lord restores his people, let Jacob rejoice, and Israel be glad. Amen. And the children can leave now to go to their activities.
- Perhaps you could turn to Romans chapter 3, on page 1131, if you've got a church Bible.
- Well, and while you're turning there, I just have to admit now, that I always thought I would become Roy Race of Melchester Rovers. But then, this is not a children's question, because the children won't have any clue about this, but some of you might.
- I then progressed from Roy Race of Melchester Rovers to gorgeous Gus. Who remembers gorgeous Gus? What comet was he in?
- [2 : 2 8] This is your starter for 10 on University Challenge. It was the victor. Did you never read the victor? Alf Tupper, Tupper the track. You've never lived.
- Well, anyway, let's come to God's Word. So it's Romans chapter 3. I'm going to read the verses from verse 21 to 31.
- And this is the passage that we're going to be looking at this morning. 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's 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.
- [3 : 3 9] He did this to demonstrate His righteousness because in His forbearance, He left the sins committed beforehand and punished. 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? 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 Jews 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. Well, I want us to consider that passage this morning and to take one particular part of that passage as our text, as it were.

[5 : 00] Because partway through it, it talks about the law of faith. It's slightly different in this version but in the ESV it calls it the law of faith.

It talks about the law as it was in those days and compares it with this law of faith. And I want us to examine this morning what that law of faith is.

And I'd like to help you to remember some of the things I'm going to say by giving you three headings. And I'll explain the headings as we go along.

And with a small amount of prayer maybe you'll pick up what some of them mean as we're going through the passage. My first heading is Beauty in Ugliness.

The second heading is Perfection in Chaos. And the third is Justice in Anarchy. Justice in Anarchy.

[6 : 04] I want to do with Beauty in Ugliness first. I wonder if you've ever watched one of these documentaries on television which is a fly on the wall documentary.

They follow somebody round for days weeks months sometimes years and they film every little thing that they do it seems.

And I don't know about you but it doesn't matter who it is that they film because they film them warts and all you see some of the bad things as well as the good things.

And in fact I don't think I've ever seen one of those documentaries where at the end of it there wasn't something that I just disliked about whoever it was who was involved in a documentary.

No matter how many wonderful things they did or the skills that they showed or whatever it might be at the end of it because they were filmed you know doing what they came naturally as it were you could always see the flaws and especially when you think that in those documentaries they never show you the really bad bits do they?

[7 : 22] They show you the things that they think might be acceptable to you but anything really bad either they've not filmed or destroyed it or the person has not allowed them to film it and so those things point to only one thing and of course in this particular passage that Paul is picking he points to one thing particularly in the bits that led up to this because from chapter 1 right the way through to the bit that we read in chapter 3 he's talking about the condition of man and the obvious conclusion is no one is perfect does anybody disagree?

I don't expect to see any hands because inside this is what Martin was talking about wasn't it earlier inside we know that we are not perfect we know that it's not just that we do some things which aren't perfect we actually do some things or think some things which are actually not nice at all sinful in fact and therefore this is the start point for this particular passage that is going to take us through if every single one of us was scrutinised 24-7 for any period of time how many of us would be able to stand up to that sort of scrutiny?

The answer of course is none of us none of us would be able to do that but just before this passage it's confirmed in what he says in verse 20 it says therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight no one will be declared righteous not one single person and that's what Paul is outlining in his first introduction to this particular passage in fact he describes mankind as sinful that they're full of unrighteousness and that there's going to be a judgement to come and men and women boys and girls don't like judgement they don't like to be told that they're sinful people they don't like to be told that they're unrighteous and even worse they don't like to be told that there's a judgement to come that there will be a penalty for whatever they've done wrong and of course that's a very gloomy and a negative picture which could leave us despairing but I want to turn you now to the first verse that we looked at in this particular passage because it starts with but now what Paul's about to tell them is that all the things he's describing all the things he's talking about about the human condition and how tragic it is and how sinful it is that is in the past because that bit the punishment for that and the way that the world works and its laws and all the things it puts together that's now in the past all of us were deserving of this penalty this punishment but now he's going to come as it were literally to the good news because in this passage he effectively tells us the gospel the good news but now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known he compares this unrighteousness of the people in this world with the righteousness of God and this is why we sang that last hymn let me just remind you it starts with the negative just as

Paul did in his passage it started Lord I was blind I could not see in thy mild visage any grace but now the beauty of thy face in radiant vision dawns on me second verse Lord I was deaf and it comes but now I hear thee and rejoice third verse Lord I was dumb but now third verse as touch with the living flame my lips praised you verse 4 Lord I was dead but now you have brought me to life you've quickened me from sin's dark sepulchre and this passage in Romans I'm quite sure must have been in his mind while he was writing that hymn because this is what Paul is about to reveal to these people not what has been but what is now what is the hope that is now what is the law of faith which is where we started so what is it well if you look up a definition of what a law is it is a law is a rule of action established by an authority but what is this law well the one thing that we need to understand is that this particular law the law of faith was established by God himself this isn't something which was designed by men we can look on at men whether it's in Brussels whether it's in America in the

White House whether it's in China whether it's in North Korea and we can see the laws and the decisions that men make and we might despair and if it was left up to humanity to come up with laws what a mess we'd be in what a mess we are in I don't think anybody could look around at anything that's happening in the world probably anything that's happening in our lives and not agree with the conclusion he comes to in those first few chapters and then reiterates at the start of this passage that there's no one who is righteous not one but these first few verses tell us that now but now despite the fact that all those things are true of us that God is going to give us three things and the three things are mentioned in these verses the first thing that he's going to give us is righteousness look at verse 22 talking about the righteousness of God going back to God and his righteousness that's the comparison just listen to these words say them in your head repeat them to yourself when you go to bed tonight because it's absolutely amazing said this righteousness the righteousness of God is given through faith in Jesus

[14 : 59] Christ to all who believe none of us deserve this righteousness none of us can earn this righteousness we could spend a whole lifetime devoting our lives to worthy causes but it's not going to get rid of that inner sinfulness and lack of righteousness the only way that we can receive it is through faith in Jesus Christ and it's a gift and it's not just any righteousness it's God's righteousness there's not a single person in the world though they'd love to who can condemn any Christian because the Christian is never saying I'm perfect I'm righteous the Christian is always saying I'm a sinful person but I have what the Bible calls imputed righteousness it's been given to me by God himself and no one can take it away there's a second thing and that's in verse 24 it says that all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came in Christ

Jesus the Bible tells us right way back in the beginning and as all the people of Israel worked through their history and as all the world since it's worked through their history that those who sin belong to the devil again people don't like to hear about the devil and if they say that God doesn't exist they'll certainly say that the devil doesn't exist and yet they're owned by the devil simply because the Lord says only the righteous can be in his presence and by definition then if no one is righteous if no one is a believer and having faith through Jesus then clearly they belong ultimately to the devil they might not appear to be like that in this world but one day sadly that is what will happen but again

God has given us another gift we talking about Christians are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that's buying us back from the devil that came by Christ Jesus again it's only through faith in him that we can claim this redemption we've been brought back into God's family we were outside it in this world that's full of sin and all sorts of things that we wouldn't want our children to see or even us to see and yet we've been taken back because of Christ and we've been redeemed we've been brought back but also both in that verse and in verse 26 in particular we know that the third thing that God has given us is justification let's look verse 26 he did it this is

Christ going to the cross and dying on the cross and atoning for our sin 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 if this morning you don't have any faith in Jesus none of these things apply to you none whatever position you might think you're in you might think you're completely safe particularly if you don't believe there is a God but the fact is you're on the precipice between a life in heaven and a life in hell and no one wants that to be true no one wants to see anyone have to suffer in that way and this is why Paul is telling these people in Rome about this situation and notice when he talks about this faith and talking about this new law of faith that's at work the definition you've forgotten it already

I'm sure so I'm going to repeat it every teacher does right definition of law a rule of action established by an authority this is an action it's not a passive thing it's got to be an action it's got to do something you've got to do something faith is active you cannot have faith you cannot be a Christian and just as it were sit there and let everything flow around you because the law of faith is that it's active we do things we haven't got time to say all the things that we can do but certainly some of them will come up and all of these it tells us in those verses all of them every single one are through Christ Jesus through his atoning death and so our faithlessness is paralleled by

[20 : 36] God's faithfulness this last year we've celebrated this period of Christian revival that was sparked by Martin Luther nailing up his thesis on the church at Wittenberg and through that and through what he said we know that he believed that that faith in Christ is the only thing that can save sola fides as it was in Latin and it would we know that this is one of the passages that Luther read and I'm going to prove it to you in a minute and so when I was reading it the first thing that struck me is now I know why Luther came to that conclusion it's the only conclusion you can come to by reading this passage that there's nothing we can do to earn our salvation there's nothing we can do to make ourselves good we can only accept the gift that Christ has given us and paid the penalty for and that's only through faith but it's not of a woolly oh I think

I might believe in some of the bits that I've read in the Bible about Christ our God this is real active faith that puts into practice what the Bible is telling us this is what Luther said at the time when he read this particular passage I greatly long to understand Paul's epistle to the Romans and nothing stood in my way but one expression the righteousness of God because I took it to mean that righteousness whereby God is righteous righteous and deals righteously in punishing the unrighteous night and day I pondered until I grasped the truth that the righteousness of God is that righteousness whereby through grace and sheer mercy he justifies us by faith then I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise the whole of scripture took on a new meaning and whereas before the righteousness of God had filled me with hate it's no wonder the world hates

Christians because they hate the righteousness of God because no one can stand up against it now it became to me an inexpressibly sweet and in greater love this passage of Paul became to me a gateway to heaven and it begs the question have we as Christians if that's what we are have we experienced what Luther experienced a rebirth a starting again a wiping the slate clean and now not living in the unrighteous world that we used to live in still unrighteous but being imputed with God's righteousness being given the Holy Spirit to help us along the way so that when we might fall away the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts and turns us back

Dr. John Grohl said this about what happens then perfection doesn't exist in anyone it can never be attained and then I saw on the internet one of those witty posters which said on it the idea of perfection is so imperfect because it can't happen we read earlier Psalm 14 didn't we I'm going to read you the same words again but this time from Psalm 53 which is almost exactly the same just the first three verses the fool says in his heart there is no God they're corrupt and their ways are vile there's no one who does good God looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand any who seek God everyone has turned away all have become corrupt there's no one who does good not even one and if you remember the story of

Sodom and Gomorrah then when Abraham was talking with God and seeking for God not to destroy the city because of course his brother was there then he said you know would you destroy the city if there are 50 good men there and he eventually works down until he gets to 10 and of course there wasn't a single one well it was Lot and his family and they were taken out and the city was destroyed because not one good man could be found so when Paul is giving this good news that there's another way this law of faith he gives them what that is because now but now in our day in our age today if you need to we know there is a man there was a man one good man one perfect man one righteous man and that man was Jesus who lived on this earth not only a man but God himself this is beauty in ugliness the ugliness is the world and the sin and because we're in the world we're contaminated by that we are sinful people and the beauty is that God made a plan to give his son notice what it said when we read it in verse 25 it wasn't just that he allowed

[27 : 00] Christ to die on the cross look what it says God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement God gave Christ to the authorities to die on the cross because that was the only way that the sin of the people by the shedding of his blood could be reconciled to God could be redeemed people say when they saw that film about the death of Christ the famous one that they did in recent years they said it was a horrific sight to watch Jesus on the cross and all the things that happened to him but to the Christian when you see it that might be true but actually it is the most joyful sight that you could ever see because in it is our salvation and there's no other way that that could have been atoned for but by that death there's beauty in ugliness and that's the supreme example of it when Christ died on the cross it was ugly it was terrible it was disturbing but it was the most beautiful act that has ever been committed in this world

Hebrews chapter 10 verses 10 to 13 says the most wonderful thing I'm going to read it to you it says we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all day after day every priest performs his religious duties again and again he offers the same sacrifices which can never take away sins but when this priest talking about Jesus had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins he sat down at the right hand of God for by one sacrifice he's made perfect forever those who are being made holy perfection in chaos when he sat down at the right hand of God

I heard someone preaching on this once he said of course the implication is that was it it was done there was no more work in this world to be done anymore because it was done salvation was achieved for all people and he sat down at the right hand of his father it's finished if people say there are other things in the world that can help you there are other things that can make you righteous that can make you perfect that can make you better person even if there was we still wouldn't be perfect that was the only thing that could accomplish it and when Jesus had done that when he'd risen from the dead and he went to be with the father and sat down at the right hand of God it was done for all time so whether you became a believer a thousand years ago whether it's today or whether it's in years to come the fact is no more needs to be done because it's all been done of course

Luther wasn't the only one to find this John Bunyan Pilgrim's Progress fame described the effect that these same sentiments had on him I've updated his wording because it's a bit in archaic English so I hope this is as close to what he originally said as possible he said as I was walking up and down the house in a terrible state the word of God took hold of my heart and seemed to say you are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus what an effect it had on me it was as though I woke from a troubled sleep and listening I heard him explain to me sinful man do you think because of your sin I can't save your soul but my son is with me and I look at him not you and I will deal with you as I am pleased with him there's a symbol of justice in anarchy the world is in anarchy it reminded me of that story in a tale of two cities where a man was about to die and there was anarchy in France at that time and of course the lead character took his place on the scaffold world remember he said the words today it's a far far better thing than I do than I've ever done before when

Christ died on the cross it was for all mankind not for one person you remember the Bible says you know for a righteous man someone might even dare to die but Christ died for us though we were sinners and we didn't deserve it and yet he was willing to go to the cross this is the law of faith this is the law which surpasses any other law that's in the world thinking about France wonder whether you remember what their motto is liberty equality and fraternity or liberty equality fraternity well many other countries have got things like that that they use as their motto as it were but this is actually the same as most countries do but in different words every government and

[33 : 29] I heard Theresa May say this recently aims for these three things the freedom of its people the equal value of each person and the brotherhood of all citizens that's what they're aiming for that's why virtually every war in all of creation has happened in theory because one country was trying to defend all of those the freedom of its people the equal value of each person and the brotherhood of all citizens why because all of the scientists the doctors the psychologists tell us that all people strive for three things in their lives that make them comfortable as it were in their own skin they all strive for freedom from something whatever that might be they all strive to feel valued and they all seek the friendship of others without friends as talented as you might be it's a very lonely life and a very sad one and all of these three things come out in this passage how much more then are those things true of people who have put their trust in Christ what about that freedom it's not freedom from a job that's boring it's not freedom from a life that's difficult it's not freedom from illness it's freedom from the punishment of hell in eternity there is no greater freedom than that in this world all the other things are temporary what about the second thing but let's face it if you are valued by

God so much this is what proved the righteousness of God it says in this passage he demonstrated his righteousness because he didn't punish us for our sins but he made this sacrifice of atonement through Christ doesn't that show how much God values his people and what about this friendship when you become a Christian it's not just that you have friends in the church with other Christians the Bible says that we come into God's family and Jesus Christ the one who died for our sins is our brother our brother if any of you got brothers or sisters you'll know how important that relationship is and this tells us that it's like that and it tells us here that when we trust in these things as

Christians we're secure we can't be shaken by anything in the world because we know that God will never let us go isn't it an incredibly wonderful thing for us to understand and be assured of that God loved us that he gave us his son to die on a cross that we have the opportunity simply by trusting in him to be forgiven for all of the things that we've done in the past to have the hope of an eternal life with him and to be secure whatever might come upon us in this world well how do we respond to this glorious promise that's given in here well could I suggest that both here and in the gospels and in other parts of the new testament if we come into this position that's been described then what we do become is I put down four words here blessed joyous thankful and prayerful because we've begun to appreciate what

God has done for us I want you just to imagine in closing you have two images to remember to take away the first one sums up those three things that I started with which was beauty and ugliness perfection in chaos justice in anarchy justice in anarchy is a bit of a stretch but you'll believe it when you hear the illustration I don't know whether this has ever happened to you but sometimes you're driving along a road maybe in a motorway but you're probably going too fast there to notice and you look across at the grass verge at the side of the road and if I say what you see probably most of you'd say tin cans plastic bottles paper rubbish all in the hedge grass but sometimes you look and in the midst of all those there's a beautiful flower a flower sometimes that is so rare that gardeners try really hard using their best skills to grow it in their gardens and they can't and suddenly it springs up in the middle of all that grass and all that rubbish and it's beautiful and that's what happens every time someone becomes a Christian the world whatever we might think about it is just full of rubbish and the world is not the place for the

Christian because what this particular passage points to and it's said in other parts of the scriptures is that we were made for glory glory we were made to be in glory with God himself not in amongst the rubbish and therefore we can see that that happens but my second one is less likely for all of us I suspect imagine you received a letter from the queen and in that letter it said you've just been given some honour in the honours list and you're going to meet her at Buckingham Palace and be presented with that honour and the closing sentence I understand because it's never happened to me has it happened to anybody no I didn't think so that we're not allowed to mention that we received this honour until it actually takes place imagine that

[40 : 27] I know it's hard to imagine but imagine it happened wouldn't you be absolutely bursting to tell somebody what was going to happen wouldn't you I would you know I think who can I tell where it's not going to get out that I actually told them I've got to tell somebody you know if when we read this passage and we look at all that God has done for us the provision he's made for us to come into his kingdom and to be joined with Christ and to have all the assets of heaven as it were bestowed upon us then don't we want to tell other people about it it should spur us on to tell people and not be afraid of the term I'm a Christian I believe that Jesus Christ is my saviour I believe that he saved me and that he can save you because of passages like this let me just conclude just by reading two things the first one is from

Colossians chapter 1 verse 27 because this confirms what I've just said hopefully he's talking about the Lord's people it says to them God has chosen to make known amongst the Gentiles that's us the glorious riches of this mystery which is Christ in you the hope of glory when Christ is in you when you've accepted Christ as your saviour then we have the hope of glory and that is what God intended for every one of those that he made I'm just going to close by reading Romans chapter 11 and at the end of that chapter verses 33 to 36 Paul having written this letter brought all these wonderful things out all the promises to the people of

God this is how he ends because he puts all of the honour all of the glory back to the one who gave it oh the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable his judgments and his past beyond tracing out who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counsellor who has ever given to God that God should repay him for from him and through him and for him are all things to him be the glory forever amen Lord we thank you that we can be one with Jesus thank you for the provision that you've made if we simply have faith and trust in you we ask Lord that this morning we might sense that real deep joy in our hearts of knowing your grace toward us and Lord if someone doesn't yet know you we pray that you'll move in their hearts too because we long to live in a life that's full of joy a life of promise a life of security and one which is made secure by the promises not of men but of

God himself so we praise you and thank you this morning give you all the honour and the glory in Jesus name Amen fortunately taking life to Out my little , my heart to be happy hey hug be mad