

**The Gospel of God**  
**Part 4**  
**Romans 3**  
**Pastor Charles Price**

Good Morning. As Jared said earlier, there are often folks visiting us on a weekend like this, being Thanksgiving Weekend, and we are glad you are here.

I am going to ask you to turn your Bible to Romans Chapter 3. And this is going to be continuing a series that I am doing from the book of Romans. And you may think it is not specifically about Thanksgiving, but it is the foundation upon which all of our thanksgiving to God is based, which is the cross of Christ.

I am going to read from Romans 3:21 and today I am going to read from the English Standard Version, which is the ESV. I normally use the NIV (New International Version), the 1984 edition, though it is was significantly revised to 2010. And the version we have in the seats in the 2010 revision, which in some places is quite different to the one that I actually use.

The ESV was published in 2007, so it is a recent translation and is finding wide acceptance amongst many readers and students of the Bible. I am going to read from it this morning because there is a turn of phrase that the ESV uses which I think is significant and important to what Paul is writing here that I think gets a little bit lost in the NIV.

And so I am going to put on the screen the section I am going to read from (I normally don't do that because I want to encourage you to bring your own Bibles and use the Bible yourself). But let me read you this section from the ESV.

Romans 3:21:

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it - the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. But there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as the propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had 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 has faith in Jesus.

“Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.

“For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

“Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one - who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

“Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.”

I don't pretend that is an easy passage of Scripture to read and immediately grasp the full significance of what Paul is writing. But I want to look at it this morning and I believe it will be a gateway of liberty for many of us to understand what Paul is writing there.

Let me just very briefly set the context. The last couple of times I have said, as an analogy, that when you go to visit your physician, your doctor, with symptoms that you are concerned about, their most important task is to make a proper diagnosis of what is the cause that lies behind these symptoms.

If they do not make a correct diagnosis, they will not be able to offer you a correct remedy.

And Paul, in this letter, is giving a diagnosis of the human condition, and we have looked at that diagnosis and it is a serious situation that he brings to light.

He contrasts the righteousness of God (which is the central theme of the book of Romans) with the unrighteousness of human beings.

Back in Chapter 1 Verse 17 he says,

“In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith.”

But he concludes in Chapter 3 Verse 10, looking at the human condition,

“There is no one righteous, not even one.”

Then in Chapter 1 and Verse 18 he speaks about the wrath of God, which is being revealed from heaven in the present tense there – not will be revealed in the future, but is being revealed and is being expressed in God giving people over, he explains, to the sinful desires of their hearts.

What people want to do, He lets them do and it is an expression of His wrath only in that they, he explains, receive in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Sin is always poison.

But that is not the end of the story, because then in Chapter 2 he talks about the judgement of God, which will be revealed in the future tense now,

“...on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ,” he says in Chapter 2:16.

And when he speaks of this judgement, it is not in the third person, as it has been in Chapter 1, speaking of the wrath of God on those and them (I think 32 times he speaks in the third person).

But now he brings it to the second person – it's the judgement of God on you (about 40 times he uses the second person there).

And it's not just on the Gentile, but on the Jew. Not just on those who are outside of the covenant of God but those who are inside the covenant. By implication not just on unbelievers, but we believers stand also before God. You and I face the judgement of God. That's what Paul says.

And then he finishes this section by summarizing our position in this way in Verses 10 – 12 in Chapter 3.

“There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

“All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one that does good, not even one.”

Now this is a depressing diagnosis that he is giving of the human condition. It is depressing news. But we have to understand it; we have to understand what is wrong before we begin to understand what is the remedy.

Now where we began reading this morning, he begins to provide the remedy, which he will continue to explain over a number of chapters, but he begins with a most important foundation upon which that remedy is to be found.

In Verse 21 he says,

“But now...”

Now those two words are important two words to introduce this new section. “But now” means that despite this depressing diagnosis of our condition that we must hear and understand and recognize, “but now” there is another side to this story.

But now there is a remedy to this predicament and he says in Verse 21,

“But now a righteousness from God has been made known.”

Into this deep darkness of “there is no one righteous, not even one”, there beams this tremendous light that now a righteousness from God has been made known.

Now notice the words there are important: a righteousness from God. So we immediately know he is not saying dig deeper into yourself, dig deeper into your resources, dig deeper into your ability to do something well.

He says, no, this is a righteousness that comes from outside of yourself. It is from God and completely unrelated to any capacity within yourself.

Now that's exciting news. But what does he mean and how does it work?

I want to talk about this under two simple headings. I want to look first at a problem that has to be addressed. And this problem is something, we'll see in a moment, within the Godhead Himself, within the Trinity.

And then, secondly, we will talk about a provision that has to be applied, we have to do something in response to this, and I am going to ask you and challenge you to do something this morning in response to this truth.

First of all, the problem that has to be addressed. There is a huge problem in the middle of this dilemma that Paul begins to write about here that is summed up in several remarkable contradictory statements.

Here is one of them: Verse 23 into 24:

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift.”

Now here's the contradictory element here. All have sinned and yet are justified.

Now how can it be that those who are described as “all have sinned” (that includes all of us) at the same time can be described as justified?

Or in Verse 26, how can he describe God, as he does, as being both just and the justifier? How can God, if He is just, justify those who are declared to be sinners because that verse says that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus?

Or, in the next chapter, Romans 4:5, how can it speak of God who justifies the wicked? How are the wicked justified? That seems a contradiction in terms.

The word justified in my dictionary has various definitions attached to it. One of those definitions includes, “to be vindicated.”

Well how can we say God vindicates the wicked? How can we say that?

Another meaning that it gives in my dictionary is that justified is to be justly treated. How can God justly treat the wicked and at the same time vindicate them?

That is the dilemma; that is the problem that has to be addressed.

The key to this is in two and a half verses, second part of Verse 22 down to Verse 25 (three and a half verses). And this is what he says.

“For this is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.”

Let me try to unpack that important statement. When he speaks of the blood of Christ, of course he is speaking of the cross of Christ.

Now that statement includes four things: all have sinned – he reminds us of that. All who have sinned may be justified – that’s the new ingredient now that Paul is bringing in.

Thirdly it is a gift of God’s grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whatever that means. So this being justified is a gift of God’s grace.

And the fourth thing he says in that statement there is it is made possible by the blood of Jesus being a propitiation. That’s the word he uses and that’s the crucial word that we need to understand that is used here.

It is not an everyday word; we don’t use it normally in everyday conversation. But the word propitiate, again according to my dictionary, means to turn away wrath (and remember that is an issue that Paul has stressed) by satisfying its demands and its requirements.

My dictionary also says as another rendering of that, “to propitiate is to appease an offended person”.

That begs the question: if there is an offended person involved who needs to be propitiated, his wrath needs to be turned away, who is that person?

And the answer clearly is it is God. It is His righteousness that has been Paul’s theme. It is His wrath that has been provoked. It is His judgement that we have to face. And that is presented as the key issue that has to be faced.

Now the question then is who is going to address His wrath and who is going to satisfy His judgement?

And the answer is Jesus Christ is going to address His wrath and satisfy His judgement by offering His blood as a propitiation.

Now then, to understand this, let me ask you a question. For whom did Jesus die? If I were to ask you that personally, “for whom did Jesus die?” I wonder what you would say to me.

Well you may give a variety of answers. Somebody might say Jesus died for the world. Somebody might say Jesus died for sinners. You might personalize it and say Jesus died for me.

And of course all of those statements would be true because we are the beneficiaries of His death. But it is not we who make the cross necessary; it is God's need for His wrath to be addressed and satisfied that makes the cross necessary.

So in the first instance, Jesus died for His Father. He died for God. He died because God's righteousness and His wrath and His judgement demanded atonement (that's actually the word that the NIV uses – it's a valid word, it's a good word but it doesn't capture the full meaning of propitiation that it was God who needed atonement).

You see, we don't demand the cross – we don't. We would be perfectly happy for an arrangement that said as long as you are sorry for your sin, as long as you confess your sin, as long as you repent of your sin, you can be forgiven without any need for the cross at all. Wouldn't you be happy with that?

“As long as you confess your sin and really repent and are really sorry, God will forgive you.” We would be happy with that.

When my kids were younger, if they were up to mischief occasionally – I had a son, so...frequently – if he came to me and said, “I'm sorry” and I knew that he meant it, I would say, “That's great. I forgive you.”

I don't say, “Matthew, that was wrong. One of us is going to have to die for that.”

Yet God does. We would be happy for a social arrangement that brings about our forgiveness without the cross being necessary at all.

But that is not possible to us because our natural position is that we are under the judgement of God, recipients of the wrath of God, is what Paul has taken time to explain in the earlier chapters.

And so the demand for the cross comes from within God Himself. And the reason is because God is just. And therefore because of His just character it is impossible for God just to forgive sin.

In the Old Testament Scriptures it tells us in Exodus 23:7,

“I will not acquit the guilty.”

Proverbs 17:5:

“The Lord detests acquitting the guilty.”

The idea you can go and do what you like, come back and as long as you say, “I'm sorry”, you're acquitted; God detests that because He is just.

And if God could just forgive sin then surely He would and the cross would be unnecessary and at best would be extremely extravagant as a gesture towards us if it wasn't in itself addressing fully and satisfying the just wrath of God.

So here's the issue: something has to happen to make it possible for the just one in Verse 26 to become the justifier of the ungodly, in the same verse, without any violation of His justice.

Somebody has to propitiate the wrath of God and there are one of two options: either you and me solely on the ground of our own guilt and we take the consequences. Or a sinless substitute, a sinless human being who, because of His own purity and sinlessness, is in a position to offer Himself as a substitute for those who are sinful.

And this of course is what happened on the cross, which is why Jesus Christ had to become a man, to be representative of you and me – one of us, but sinless, standing between the wrath of God and the sinfulness of every human being and, if I can use this language, and in standing between us, soaking up the wrath of God in Himself.

Elsewhere in Scripture, in 1 John 2:2, John writes,

“He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

He is the One who propitiates and addresses the wrath and judgement of God.

1 John 4:10:

“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”

Now I know this idea of propitiation has been controversial. We don't like the idea of God being angry at all. And we certainly don't like the idea of God's anger needing to be addressed. We have a stereotype of God as being without any negative emotion. He is just love; He is just kind.

But He is also just, and justice must have the capacity for wrath to be provoked when injustice is carried out.

And the heart of what Paul is saying here is that if in His justice He is not permitted to acquit the guilty simply because He wants to, then the only grounds on which we may be acquitted is that the Lord Jesus Christ takes the consequences of our sin upon Himself and satisfies the just wrath of God so that as a result you and I can be acquitted. In the words of Chapter 4 Verse 5, the ungodly can be justified.

You see there are two things in the character of God that make the cross necessary – His justice on the one hand and His mercy on the other.

Now when you think about it, if God is just, as He is, if God is merciful, as He is, these two things are actually incompatible because justice is giving people what they deserve – that’s justice. Mercy is not giving people what they deserve.

Now how is it possible to be just and merciful at the same time? You might say, well, mercy might cause you to come half way, so instead of giving the full penalty that the justice demands, you simply go halfway and say, well, learn a lesson from this and just take a little bit.

You might say you can reconcile somewhere in the middle. But then you would neither be just nor would it be merciful in its entirety.

We cannot apply justice and mercy to the same person at the same time for the same crime. We can’t do that in a court of law.

Let me illustrate. Just supposing I drove my car down Sheppard Avenue outside this building at 100 km. an hour. It’s never free enough to do that but supposing I did, and the limit is 50 (Is it? 60? What is it? 60? Oh wow, I can do another 10 km. on there.)

And I drive down there at 100 km. an hour. I am pulled over. I elect to go to court and I stand in front of the judge there and he says, “Are you guilty or not guilty of driving your car at 100 km. an hour in a 60 km. zone?”

And I say to him, “I am guilty.” He’s got all the evidence anyway. So I come clean. “I’m guilty.”

Now he can do one of two things. He can say, “I am going to fine you \$300 or whatever the going rate is (I don’t actually know – Brian, do you know? You don’t? You sure? Just think of it.)

Let’s say it’s \$300. He can deal with me justly, fine \$300. And I pay the fine and I go.

Or he can deal with me mercifully and say, “Look, I understand you were in a hurry and you don’t do this very often (ha-ha) and just don’t do it again. You’re free.”

But he can’t do both. He can’t satisfy legal justice and also at the same time show me mercy – he can do one or the other but not both.

God is both just and both merciful. How does He remain just and how does He remain merciful without compromising either?

Back to the courtroom – and this is an inadequate illustration but it will make the particular point I want to make.

Supposing a friend of mine comes in (and I don’t have many friends like this) and he says, “What happened?”



I say, "I was guilty."

"Well, I know that, but what happened?"

"Well I got fined \$300."

"You got \$300?"

"Well, no, not really."

"Well, you know something – I have got my chequebook with me" and he writes out a cheque payable to that court for \$300 and in the memo line he puts "Charles Price's speeding fine" and he signs his name on the bottom right hand corner.

And he hands it over to the clerk of the court and the records of that court will say,

"Charles Price: offense (I think that's the word they probably use): speeding 100 km. in 60 km. zone.

Guilty.

Punishment: fine \$300.

Paid."

The intervention of a third party has meant this: owing nothing himself to the court, he pays my fine and satisfies the justice of the court - fined \$300; paid \$300.

But I step out of there, the recipient of mercy made possible by my friend. He has freed me.

Now if you want to pick bones, there are inadequacies with that illustration because it is actually the judge Himself who steps out and pays the fine, but I am making the point of a third party stepping into the situation and satisfying the justice of the court.

So in the courtroom of heaven the record is "Charles Price: sinner – guilty, under the wrath of God. Satisfied. Paid."

Why? Because Jesus who had no sin of His own stepped into the situation and on the cross He was saying in effect, as the Father looks at Me, He sees Charles Price and all the wrath of God against his sin (my sin), all the judgement of God upon my sin. He, as my substitute was taking it all.

It was as if He were me and having paid in full, it becomes as if I were He. That is, I am now declared righteous, as He is righteous, is what Paul is meaning: "But now a righteousness from God." You have been declared righteous because the justice of God has been satisfied in the person of Jesus Christ regarding my sin. Justice has been satisfied.

Now I want to ask you a question. This time I am going to ask you to respond to it actually. When you confess your sin to God and you ask Him to forgive you, do you appeal to His justice or do you appeal to His mercy?

“Please forgive me.” Are you asking Him to be merciful or just there?

If you appeal to His justice, will you raise your hand? There are a few hands, very few hands. There are a few hands though.

If you appeal to His mercy, would you raise your hands? And that is by far the majority.

I asked you that question because I thought you might get it wrong. And actually you did get it wrong and it is a very significant getting it wrong, and I will tell you why.

Do you know 1 John 1:9, you know what that says? It says,

“If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

You see, because Jesus Christ has met in full the just demands of God, the grounds on which He forgives us is His justice.

If I may put it this way, He is legally, morally, obligated to forgive us. Why? Because Christ has paid for it.

That’s why we are not described as being mercified – there is no such word, but we are described as being justified, and that is very beautiful word. Justice has been satisfied.

Now this is very important. You know many of the liturgical churches will go through a period of confession as part of their services and the response to that confession, which is repeated a number of times in the service, “Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy”.

And I understand fully the humility that lies behind that appeal. We deserve nothing. And behind the cross of Christ is the mercy of God, of course, and the love of God, of course. It was in mercy that He came to be our substitute.

But the grounds on which we are forgiven is the justice of God.

You see if you appeal to His mercy it is very likely you will come to a point where you have confessed something repeatedly. And you will say to yourself, “I have confessed this at least 100 times to God and this is the 101<sup>st</sup> time. Surely He is not going to forgive me again. Surely I have exhausted His mercy”, if you are appealing to His mercy.

Let me illustrate this. Supposing you leave the church here one Sunday and you are driving home and you are just desperate for a cup of coffee. And you pull in at a coffee shop and you go

in and you say, “I would love a cup of coffee please but I have got a problem. My problem is that I forgot to bring any money with me. But would you give me a cup of coffee?”

They say, “Well, sir, we are not running a charity here. Maybe go to the Salvation Army and you might get one, but here, no, I am sorry, we charge you. We are a business.”

“Yeah, but, it’s a cup of coffee I am talking about. I mean, don’t you empty the pot every 20 minutes to make sure it doesn’t get stale? I mean, how much do you pour down the drain? You must pour gallons down the drain. Just give me a cup. It doesn’t have to be large; it can just be medium. Just give me...”

“Well we don’t give away coffee here. There’s a big sign there telling you what it costs.”

“Yeah, but just this once. Go on – please!”

And there is a line-up behind you now so the guy says, “Alright, just I have got to deal with those other customers. Here’s your cup of coffee. Don’t tell anybody.”

And you go and sit and enjoy your cup of coffee. That’s great.

Next week you come to church and on the way home you are dying for another cup of coffee and you pull into the same coffee shop and you go up to the cashier and you say, “I’d love a cup of coffee.”

“Yeah, I remember you last week actually. I hope you have got some money.”

“Well, no, as a matter of fact, I didn’t bring any money with me this time either.”

“I’m sorry; we’re not giving you another cup of coffee.”

“Listen, you gave me one last week. Did it hurt you? Did you lose your job? Did you go bankrupt? Come on, as I told you last week, you pour how much down the drain every day because it’s 20 minutes old? Give me a 19-minute old cup of coffee if you have to.”

“Listen, I told you last week, we are a business. We don’t just give away cups of coffee.”

“Yeah, but once, come on - well, twice – you did it last week. I know you are very kind, I mean you really are a lovely person actually because you gave me one last week. Go on – give me one.”

And there is a line-up building already.

So he says, “Look, last time, here’s your cup of coffee.”

You take and enjoy your cup of coffee. Third week, you are on your way home. You pull into the coffee shop and as you walk through he says, “Uh-oh.”

And you say, “Yeah, I would love a cup of coffee but, you know, I forgot to bring money again. I put it all in the offering at the church.”

“Listen chum, get out of here. I am not going to give you cups of coffee every week for nothing.”

You see, you are appealing to his mercy. He can give you or he cannot give you. You are just appealing to his mercy.

But supposing I know you and I know that you don’t carry money and I know you love your coffee. And so I drop into the coffee shop, you know, on my way on that first Sunday and I say, “I have got a friend who is always wanting a cup of coffee and never carries the money. Here’s 50 bucks; give him some coffee when he comes in.”

So you pull up and you go in and you say, “Hi, I would love a cup of coffee but I am sorry I don’t have any money with me. I totally forgot.”

“What’s your name? Oh, no problem, here you are; have a coffee.” And he gives it to you.

Next week you go in and you say, “I didn’t bring any money again. You were kind last week.”

“No, that’s right. No, I remember you. Yeah, sure, what do you want this time? Have a latte if you like.”

And you drop in the third week and he says, “I have been waiting for you. Here’s your coffee. Have a donut to go with it. Come on.”

You see the second time you are appealing to his justice.

Now listen I am making a serious point here and it’s this: when it comes to your sin, there is cash in the till.

I don’t mean by that, wow, you are free to go and sin as much as you want. Though I understand – and Paul understands – why we might come to that conclusion, because he says in Chapter 6 (and we will look at it in Chapter 6), “Shall we therefore continue in sin because grace is so inexhaustible?”

And he says, “Of course not.” And he gives you reasons.

But nevertheless he only asks the question because he is teaching what I have told you about the coffee, that it’s paid.

And when you and I come in genuine confession and turning from our sin – and of course confession is not just naming it; it is turning from it, it is recognizing it for the poison that it is

and saying, “Lord Jesus, I confess my sin and You are faithful and just.” And you look at me and you look at Jesus and you say, “It’s paid for.”

Do you know the role that Jesus Christ has now on the right hand of the Father? In 1 John Chapter 2 it tells us if we sin we have an advocate, a lawyer, representing us with the Father - Christ Jesus, the Righteous One.

What is it saying? It is saying if you sin – and you will – and you come before God, our judge, you have a lawyer, an advocate. His name is Jesus Christ. And He says, “Father, Charles Price’s sin was covered in full on the cross.”

The blood of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, cleanses him from most of his sin? No. All his sin.

Actually if we were to talk about this, there are two advocates, two lawyers. One is Satan. He is called the accuser of the brethren. In the book of Zachariah, there is a picture of Satan standing accusing a man called Joshua and he is dressed in filthy rags and Satan is saying, “This guy claims to be one of your people.”

And Satan is standing before the Father accusing me. “Charles Price, you know, he stands up there in that pulpit. Do you know what he does when no one is looking? You know what he has been up to?”

And the Lord Jesus says, “Actually, yes I do. I know exactly what he has been up to. I know every detail and Father, it is covered.”

And the Father says, “It is covered.”

And in justice He says, “You are forgiven.”

Because Jesus endured everything you and I deserve on the cross. And as a result, we are justified. This is such an important word – justified.

I have used this illustration before but one of the best illustrations I know of this word comes from the days when capital punishment was practised in Scotland. Scotland has a different law to English law and when a man was hanged they put a notice outside the prison and the wording of that notice had to conform to legal requirements.

And whatever else it said it said this: On such and such a date (naming the date of the execution) at Market Cross, Edinburgh, Barlinnie Prison, Glasgow or wherever the prison was, so and so (naming the person) was justified at 9 a.m.

What did they mean he was justified? Did they mean he was forgiven? No justified doesn’t mean forgiven; it has got a much deeper meaning than that.

What it meant was at 9 o’clock that morning when he was executed all the just requirements of the law were fully, totally, completely met. And this case is, as of 9 a.m., closed - closed.

The judge is on another case. The police have been assigned to other situations. The lawyers have put the books away and they are on to something else. This case is over. It is over. And legally, should they discover even that it was an execution of the wrong person, they cannot retry the same case again. It is over.

And when He declares us to be justified, this beautiful word means far more than that we are forgiven; it means the case is over. It is over. And you and I may enjoy the incredible liberty of that because Jesus Christ has satisfied fully the justice of God.

But there is a second section and I am going to be very brief on this – I intended to be very brief on this.

The problem that had to be addressed is that God is both the just and the justifier. Well how does that work? Well we have tried to understand that.

The second thing is the provision that has to be applied. Christ has died, historically, on a certain day outside the city walls of Jerusalem. But that does not mean an automatic universal salvation. It is true that Christ died for all people because as we read in 1 John 2:2,

“He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”

There was enough in the sacrifice of Christ to cover the sins of the whole world.

But not all people are saved. Why not? Because it has to be appropriated, it has to be applied personally.

How do we do that? Go back to the key verse here in Chapter 3:21,

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

This righteousness is by faith and it is to all who believe. I am going to develop that in Romans 4 because Paul does in Romans 4. But I need to say enough for you to enter into the good of it here this morning.

You see if it is by faith to all who believe, we recognize it has nothing to do with our own abilities or the capacity to save ourselves. It is exclusively from putting our trust in Jesus Christ, saving us.

An old hymn that came to mind when I was preparing this – Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me. Some of you will know it of course. It has a lovely verse in that hymn. It says,

Nothing in my hand I bring  
Simply to Your cross I cling  
Naked, come to Thee for dress  
Helpless, look to You for grace  
Foul, I to the fountain fly  
Wash me, Savior, or I die

And what I love about that verse is that it is acknowledging nothing in my hand do I bring. I come naked, I come helpless, I come foul, dirty, in my natural self.

Archbishop William Temple was a very godly archbishop of Canterbury less than a century ago but back in the 1930's. And William Temple wrote this:

*“The only contribution we make to our salvation is the sin which makes it necessary for us to be saved.”*

So if it is not strictly true “nothing in my hand I bring”; what I do bring in my hand is my sin – that’s all. And I come and say, “Lord, this is who I am, this is what I am. This is where I have been, this is what I have done. Would You forgive me? Would You cleanse me on the grounds of justice? With the blood of Jesus Christ cleanse me from sin.”

It goes on to say in the book of Romans – I will give you just 3 or 4 verses very quickly – in Romans 4:8,

“Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

“Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.”

Why not? Because they have been counted against Christ. What a wonderful liberty!

One of several who I talked to at the end of the service this morning said to me, “I feel incredible liberty” because this morning she had said, “Lord Jesus, my sin is on You and I am free.” And she immediately felt emotionally, psychologically, spiritually free. Blessed is that man or that woman, says Paul.

Romans 5:1:

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Earlier Paul has talked about the wrath of God and the judgement of God; now he says we have peace with God.

Romans 5:10 says,

“When we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son.”

No longer are we on opposing sides; we are now united and reconciled. We’re friends.

And in Romans 8:1:

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

No condemnation means God has nothing against you anymore. Why? Because everything He had the right to hold against you, He held against Christ. And therefore as He held against Christ what He should have held against you, He now holds against you what He held against Christ.

What is that? “You are My beloved son.”

And we are accepted, Ephesians 1:6 says, in the beloved. We are loved. We are accepted. We are as loved as much as Jesus is loved by His Father – as much – because we are accepted in the beloved; we have taken His position.

And forgiveness meets one of the deepest needs of the human life, psychologically, spiritually. But the central issue is not just that we are just forgiven – that is wonderful. The central issue is we have been reconciled to God. That’s the issue. We are reconciled to God and we are now accepted in Him and loved by Him.

But, you know, it’s not automatic. If we confess our sins – I have said before a number of times, sin leaves our body through our mouth. We confess it.

Elsewhere in Scripture confession involves repenting of it, turning from it and turning to and believing in the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive us.

And it is deliberate. You know it’s a bit like getting married. That is a biblical illustration. Christ is the bridegroom; we are the bride.

If you get married, you know, it’s a deliberate willful thing that you do.

If you say to somebody, a young guy, “Are you married?”

He’d say, “Well, you know, I am not sure. I hang around girls a lot so maybe I am.”

You say, no that doesn’t work. No, what happens is there comes a moment when you stand with a young lady in front of her and an officiating person who says, “Will you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, to have and to hold, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, etc.?” And he says, “I will.”

Now he’s not married yet.



Then he turns to the bride and says, “Will you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband, to have to and hold etc. until death us do part?” And she says, “I will.”

And when he has heard the “I will” from both, he says, “I now pronounce you man and wife.” And they are married.

Do you know something? There is a day when the Father from heaven said in effect to the Son, “Will you take these people and all their sin and failure and mess, not just here and now in Israel, but across the centuries down to the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Toronto Canada; will you take these men, these women, whatever their past, whatever their history, whatever their sin; will You cleanse them on the basis of the blood that is shed? Will You forgive them? Will You place Your Holy Spirit in them and give them the gift of eternal life?”

And from the cross He was saying in effect by being there, “I will.”

That doesn't make you a Christian yet because now the Father turns to you and says, “Will you take the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior? Will you look to Him exclusively as the One whose death can cleanse you of all of your sin and will you receive His forgiveness and will you receive His gift of the Holy Spirit to live within you?”

And He awaits your answer. And until there is an “I will”, there is no pronouncement that you are now united.

And this morning I extend to you that question and invite you to make that response, “I will.”

“I will thank the Lord Jesus that all my sin was placed on Him. I will confess that I am a sinner. And on the grounds of the justice of God I will receive His forgiveness that I might be indwelt then by His Holy Spirit and be equipped to live a new life.”

I am going to lead you in prayer. And I am persuaded there will be a number of people here this morning who need to make that transaction. There are some people here this morning and you have lived without any sense of freedom from your sin, you have been plagued by memory of its guilt and you need to be liberated from that by believing it is on the grounds of justice that God cleanses you. Christ has paid in full.

I am going to ask you to pray with me a response and I am going to ask you, if you pray that with me, to stand and then we are going to sing just because doing something physical will help you remember.

And those who are watching on television, listening on the radio, if you know God is speaking to you, then you too, wherever you are, can pray in response and say, “Lord, forgive me, cleanse me, take over my life.”

And then we are going to sing a wonderful song, a hymn that responds to the cross of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together and if God has spoken to you, would you pray with me?

Lord Jesus Christ, Thank You that You died for me and Your blood is sufficient to cover all of my sin. I confess that I am a sinner, deserving the judgement of God. But You have taken it on Yourself. Forgive me. Free me from my sin. Thank You that the Father forgives me because He is just and You have paid for it in full. I ask that the Holy Spirit will come to live in me and give me strength to live a new quality of life that displays Your presence in me. Thank You for hearing my prayer.”