

## **Lifblood: The One Thing You Can't Live Without**

The Gospel: What We Believe

Dr. David Platt

April 13, 2008



### **The Gospel: What We Believe Romans 3:21-26**

Well, good morning. If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Romans 3. It is good to be back this morning. Heather and I had a few days away with some other pastors, and it was very valuable, and I am very thankful for Deric Thomas for preaching the Word last week. I fully realize that it was somewhat cruel of me to preach the message I did two weeks ago, and then, leave you hanging last week. There were quite a few questions after the message a couple of weeks ago, and not a few criticisms along the way. It's good to know you are listening.

What I would like to do real briefly, at the beginning here, is address a couple of the rumors that I have heard over the last couple of weeks. I am going to address them briefly because we are going to dive into these things in depth in the Word in the coming weeks as a part of this series, but suffice to say that some of these rumors need to be squelched. There are rumors about David preaching a works-based salvation; there are rumors about David denying assurance of salvation, and rumors that the pastor is just wanting to confuse everybody about what it means to be saved.

So, let's just take those one by one. First, a works-based salvation. What I did two weeks ago that caused some trouble, I think, was I quoted Jesus, and He said, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven."* He said it. He said,

*Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on a rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, the wind blew and beat against that house and it did not fall because it had its foundation on a rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, the wind blew and beat against the house, and it fell with a great crash.*

Jesus is talking here about obedience to His will, obedience to His Word. Now, a couple of weeks ago when we looked at that, I said, "Hold on to this, because it's at this point that we have got to be careful. We can twist the gospel into something it's not. Just hold onto what Jesus is saying here." I don't believe that Jesus is, in any way, saying in Matthew 7 that our work is the basis for salvation. I didn't say that a couple of weeks ago. We are going to see in the coming weeks where works plays into our salvation, if it plays in at all. However, suffice to say, at this point, Scripture knows nothing of our works as the basis for our salvation. At the same time, Scripture knows absolutely nothing of praying a prayer, and then, your life looking the exact same after that prayer and thinking that's salvation. So, works are not the basis for our salvation.

Second, that leads to this assurance of salvation idea. People have asked, "Well, don't you believe in 'once saved, always saved.'" Another phrase which, by the way, is not mentioned

in Scripture, but we'll get to that. That does not mean I am saying that you can't be assured of salvation. That's the last week in this series. However, I think part of that was caused by the fact that I made this statement a couple of weeks ago: "Could it be that Christ could one day say to you or me, 'I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers.'" People walked away thinking, "Well, if David's not saved then how can we know if we are saved? Maybe he is just saying that."

Ladies and gentlemen, it's at this point that I want to stop you right there in your tracks and hear me loud and clear. It is more than possible to be the pastor of The Church at Brook Hills and not know Christ. Does my position in the church warrant standing before God? Absolutely not. That is why...and I look at some of my spiritual heroes in the past. George Whitefield, John Wesley, men who have been used mightily by God...you read their biographies. Whitefield would fast forty days at a time. He was praying in private prayer seven times a day. He was going aside to public worship every single day. He participated in the Lord's Supper every single day. He and John Wesley studied the Greek New Testament every single day. Whitefield would later say that he had been doing all of those things, and he had never come to know Christ. He still knew nothing of the new birth is what he said in his journal. These guys were more committed than just about every single one of us in this room, and they didn't know Christ.

The reality is, if I had excluded myself a couple of weeks ago and said, "Some of you may stand before Jesus one day, and He might say to you, 'I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers.'" As soon as I said that, most of you in this room would have thought, "Well, he is speaking to somebody else." However, as soon as I included myself, you realized that we were all in the same boat, meaning, every single one of us in this room is prone to spiritual deception. All of us are. Jesus is speaking in Matthew 7 to religious people. It is possible for someone to think they are a follower of Christ and not actually be a follower of Christ. I am not talking about assurance of salvation; I am talking about salvation, period. We are all prone to spiritual deception. That is why I said, "I want to urge you, in these days ahead, I want to urge you to examine yourselves." This is biblical. 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourselves. Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith." Scripture tells us to do this.

That leads to the third rumor, that I am just trying to confuse everybody. Ladies and gentlemen, can I fill you in on something? We are already confused. We have so muddled tradition with Scripture that we have lost sight, in many ways, of what Scripture says is involved in salvation, and that is a very dangerous thing to do. My goal, I promise, is not to confuse. My goal, in these weeks, is to clarify the gospel of Jesus Christ; biblically see the picture of the gospel. In light of the fact that Jesus, in Matthew 7 said, to religious people, "Many of you...many of you will one day stand before me and be surprised to find that you never knew me. I never knew you."

All I want to do over these few weeks is to get you, every single one of you in this room and myself, to ask the question, "Are you in the many? Are you in the many?" This is a good question to ask, because it will lead to one of two results. We ask that question. We do what 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, and we examine ourselves; we test ourselves to see if we are in the faith. What happens is one of two things. Number one, we find, "Yes, yes I am in Christ." We, in a sense, rediscover the joy of the gospel and how it's taken root in our souls in how we are saved, and we will find great comfort in Christ, and we will see how the gospel really does radically affect every facet of our lives. That is a good thing.

Or, second, maybe more important, there may be many of us during these weeks, many of us who realize, "No, I have assumed salvation without biblical foundation, and I am not in

Christ." You will find yourself running to Christ for the very first time, to truly trust in Him for salvation and that is an infinitely good thing.

So, that's the road that we're on, and we're going to unpack this in different ways over the next few weeks. The goal is not to give the pocket version of the gospel. This is where we have so minimized the gospel down to these couple of things, that if I, almost, check these boxes off, then I will be okay before God. It's not what we need to do. We need to see the gospel for what it is, which is what we are going to do today. We are going to look at the objective content of the gospel. Then, over the next three weeks, we are going to look at how that objective content of the gospel is appropriated in our lives; how that gospel becomes real in our lives.

So, I want to take just a minute, and I want you to write down on a sheet of paper the answer to this question: What is the gospel? What is the good news? Take about sixty seconds and write down, "What is the gospel?"

As you finish writing that down, let's pray together. God, we thank you for the cross, and we pray that you would help us realize the ramifications of the cross. Uncover, these days, by the power of the Spirit, any spiritual deception in our lives. I pray that all of us who are in this room, God, that you would open our eyes and our minds, some of us, for the first time truly today to see the gospel for what it is. God, we pray that as we see it today that you would get great glory from the gospel as it is revealed, and that you would get great glory from our lives as they are transformed by the gospel. Help us to realize what the gospel is. We pray, in Jesus' name, Amen.

One of the reasons I wanted to do this series is because I am convinced that there is a famine when it comes to the gospel in the church. I am convinced there are many people who have been in church for years, who, when asked the question, "What is the gospel?", have some vague ideas here or there, but can't describe fully what the gospel is, and you can tell by the way the gospel is often presented in our contemporary church culture. You listen to evangelistic invitations, look at evangelistic tracts, and you see the gospel explained as, "Well, the gospel is God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." That is not the full, biblical gospel. That is a good thing, but it is not the gospel.

There are a lot of things that are couched as the gospel today that are not the gospel. Keith Green was a radical in his day. He said, "I believe with all my heart that Jesus would be ashamed of most of the gospel messages and sermons that are being preached today, mainly because they lack almost every major point He, Himself, preached on."

So, what I want to do today is I want us to look at a thick passage of Scripture: Romans 3:21-26. Martin Luther called this chapter, "The chief point of the whole Bible." It is one of the most important texts in all the Bible, if not the most important text. I want to encourage you, if you do not have Romans 3:21-26 committed to memory, to hide these words in your heart over the coming days. This is a picture of the gospel. What I want us to do is I want us to see the objective content of the gospel in these words. Listen to what Paul writes, Romans 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. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to*

*demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*

## **The Gospel**

Now, what I have attempted to do is take that passage of Scripture, and I have taken my best shot at putting together a one sentence summary of what the gospel is. I hesitate even to do this in front of you because the goal is never to reduce the gospel down to its minimal content. The reality is, every single phrase in the sentence I am about to give you...really, the phrases that are here in Romans 3:21-26...every single one is like the tip of an iceberg, and there is so much that lies beneath it. However, at the core, what is the gospel?

I want you to look at this sentence with me. The gospel, the good news, is "the just and gracious God of the universe looked upon hopelessly sinful people and sent His Son, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin on the cross and to show His power over sin in the resurrection so that all who have faith in Him will be reconciled to God forever."

Now, I realize that is a completely loaded sentence. I realize that it almost seems, at the front, a little complicated. "Can't we just simplify this picture?" However, don't miss it. Yes, the gospel is simple and involves trust and childlike faith, but to say that its core doctrines of what it means to be saved are just flippant misses the point. We have got to look, because I am convinced, you take out...and this is not a perfect one-sentence explanation of the gospel; I am not saying it's the only one-sentence explanation of the gospel, but I am convinced that if you take out one of those phrases from that sentence, you undercut the gospel of its power completely. We have got to see the gospel in its totality.

## **The just and gracious God of the universe ...**

So, what I want us to do is I want us to unpack that one sentence in light of Romans 3:21-26, and I want you to see, really at the core, five main elements involved in the gospel. We will start with this first phrase, "The just and gracious God of the universe..." When we read Romans 3:21, you see the first word is, "*But...But now a righteousness from God...*" What is happening is Paul is here making a transition in verse 21 from an argument he started way back in Romans 1:18. In Romans 1:18 all the way to Romans 3:20, he is giving us a portrait of God and of man in relation to each other.

In fact, turn back with me to Romans 1, and we are going to fly through some passages this morning. You might write them down if you don't have time to turn to them all. Romans 1, and you come back to verse 16, and this is almost a theme verse for the book of Romans. Paul says, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*" So, he is talking about the gospel as the power of God to salvation.

Then, he gets to verse 18, and he begins to describe who God is; he begins to describe the character of God. Oddly enough, he starts with the wrath of God, verse 18 says,

*The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

### **God is Creator.**

What he is talking about there is a picture of God, and what I want you to see are three attributes of God that are emphasized in Romans 1:18 all the way to the passage we just read a second ago. The first attribute of God is that God is our Creator. He is the Creator. "*Since the creation of the world his invisible qualities have been made known...*"

You get down a little further, and it says in verse 24, "*God gave them over to sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity, and they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the creator who is forever praised. Amen.*" What Paul is saying in the beginning of Romans 1 is he is saying, "God has created us. He has shown Himself to us. He has revealed Himself as our Creator, and as our Creator, we belong to Him. He owns us. He has rights over us." This is key. God is Creator.

### **God is Judge.**

Second, God is Judge. This is where he comes in Romans 2. He starts to talk about the judgment of God. You read Romans 2:1 all the way down to Romans 2:16, you see the judgment of God mentioned over and over and over again. Let's see what it says,

*You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?*

Then, listen to what he says down here, in verse 6:

*God will give to each person according to what he has done. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.*

You get down to verse 16, he says, "*This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*" Ladies and gentlemen, what he is saying there is very clear. To every single person in all of history, every single person in this room, God will judge you. You will be judged by God, and He will be just in His judgement. That's a scary thing when you get to Romans 3:5, because it is there that God is just in bringing His wrath on us. This is where, in Romans 1:18-3:20, God's wrath is tied to His justice. The reality is our Creator will one day judge every single one of us in this

room. There is not one student, there is not one man or woman in this room that is beyond the judgement of God and a very just judgement at that.

God is Creator, God is Judge, and thankfully, we have this, "*But now...*" in Romans 3:21. Martin Lloyd-Jones called these the two greatest words in all the Bible, because we are not left with just the judgement of God. You get to this passage we just read, and you see that verse that is so famous, "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" Then, the verse after it, which is far more important, but not so famous. Verse 24, "*...and are justified freely by his...*" What? "*...by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*"

### **God is gracious.**

Here's the third attribute of God, emphasized in Romans 1 through 3: God is Creator, God is Judge, and God is gracious. He is Creator, He is Judge, and He is gracious. He gives unmerited favor. This is the portrait of God in Romans 1 through 3, and I want you to hold on to them, because after we get to this next truth about man, we are going to see how this is a big deal over here that God is Creator, He is Judge and He is gracious.

### **... looked upon hopelessly sinful people ...**

So, we'll start, "The just and gracious God of the universe..." I am not saying those are the only attributes of God, but when it comes to the gospel, these are the attributes of God that we must understand: That He created us, that He judges us with just judgement, and that He is gracious. All three of those attributes are coming together in the gospel. We'll see that in a second.

The second phrase, "The just and gracious God of the universe looked upon hopelessly sinful people..." This is Romans 3:23, "*...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*" All. That pretty much takes care of it. Every single one of us in this room; every single person in all of history. In fact, if you back up to Romans 3:9-10, you see one of the most stinging indictments of humanity in any place in Scripture. Listen to what he says, "*As it is written...*" He starts quoting from the Old Testament in verse 10,

*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 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.*

That's talking about you and me. Not one of us in this room who does good. Our throats are open graves; our tongues practicing deceit. Poison of vipers on our lips. Mouths full of cursing and bitterness. Ruin and misery marking our ways. No fear of God before our eyes. This is a stinging indictment of man. Hopelessly sinful people.

### **We have rebelled against God.**

Now, what does that mean? I believe it means three primary truths here in Romans 3. Number one, it means that we have rebelled against God. To be hopelessly sinful means we have rebelled against God. The whole context of Romans 3:21-26 is talking about the law of God and how we have broken, or transgressed, God's law. This law written in this book; this

law written on our hearts, he talks about in Romans 2. We have all done wrong; we have all gone against God's law.

It's the picture that was inaugurated in Genesis 3 with Adam and Eve in the Garden. "Who cares if God said, 'Don't eat from that tree'? Who is He anyway? We are going to do what we want." Rebelling against the law of God. It's where sin started, and it's where sin continues in every single part of our lives. We have all rebelled against God's law. We have spurned the lordship of God in our life and said, "We want to do things our own way."

You think about it. God says to the wind and the rain, "You blow here, and you fall there", and they do it immediately. God who says to mountains, "You go there." The God who says to seas, "You stop there." The God who calls the storm clouds together, and they obey Him. He beckons them together, and they immediately come. The God to whom all creation responds in perfect obedience comes to man and says, "Do this", and man looks at Him in the face and says, "No. No, I am going to do things my own way." The audacity of rebellion against God. We are all guilty. We have rebelled against Him.

### **We are separated from Him.**

Second, we are separated from Him. "All have sinned and fall short of His glory." We don't have time this morning to go into an Old Testament definition of the glory of God, but suffice to say, at this point, that, most often, the glory of God is equated with the presence of God. The picture we have here in Romans 3:23 is, because of our sin, we are cut off from the glory of God. We are cut off from the presence of God. Even to go back to Genesis 3, man, Adam and Eve, in perfect communion with God...in perfect communion with the presence of God, and one sin comes into the picture, and they are cut off from perfect communion with Him.

This is the problem that sin poses, and we have got to realize this. When we talk about the gospel, when we are explaining the gospel to people, and we say, "Have you ever lied? Well, you have sinned. Have you ever done wrong things? Well, that is what sin is." That is not what sin is. Yes, that is an effect of sin, that we do wrong things. However, our problem is not that we have done wrong things; our problem is not that we have made bad decisions; it is not that we messed up. Our problem is that we are cut off from the presence of God. We are separated from God because we have rebelled against Him. That's the problem that sin poses. Separated from God.

### **We are dead without God.**

Hopelessly separated from Him, which leads to our third truth: We are dead without God. Dead without God. This is what Paul says in verses 19-20. He says, "*We know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law...*" Listen to this phrase. "*...so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world accountable to God.*" What this means is you and I stand...rebels against God, separated from Him...with nothing to say or do about it. Absolutely nothing. We are dead without God. The wages, the payment of sin...later in Romans 6:23...is death. We are dead without Him. It's why Ephesians 2:1 says, "*You were dead in your transgressions...*"

An old preaching professor used to take his students every semester to the cemetery one day. He would take them out to the cemetery, and they would get around the cemetery, and, one by one, he would challenge the students to speak over the graves in the cemetery and cause the dead to come to life with their words. One by one, they would try, and of course, one by one, they would fail. Then, he would look at them and remind them that when they preach, they speak to people who do not know Christ, who are cut off from God because of their sin, who are dead in sin. No matter how eloquent their sermon is, or no

matter how passionate their invitation is, there is nothing their words can do apart from the Spirit of God. Nothing. Dead in sin.

Now, how do you go from being dead to alive? What can you do to get from being dead to being alive? You can do absolutely nothing. It's impossible for you to do, and that's the point of what Paul is showing us here. Hopelessly sinful people. Now we see the difference between the biblical gospel and modern day gospel. In the modern day gospel, God loves you and has a plan for your life. Biblical gospel, you are an enemy of God, and you are hopelessly dead without Him. In your present state, you have no hope whatsoever. That doesn't sell as many books. It doesn't draw as many crowds. It's the biblical gospel, though. Hopelessly dead in sin, hopelessly separated from God, a willful rebel against God, an enemy of God. This is the picture we have of our lives.

Now, here is where I want us to pause for a second and put these first two truths together. "The just and gracious God of the universe looked upon hopelessly sinful people..." You try to put those two phrases together, and they don't fit. This is where we see, we feel the tension of the gospel. We need to feel this tension, because if we don't feel the tension here, we will miss the heart of the gospel. The tension is, the question is, "In light of sinfully rebellious people, how can God be both just and gracious? How is that possible to be just and gracious toward rebels, toward sinful people?"

Let me show you a verse that you probably don't have underlined in your Bible that you need to back in Proverbs. Look at Proverbs 17. Turn to Proverbs 17:15. I want to show you this verse that gives a clear picture of this tension here that is being posed by the gospel. Look at Proverbs 17:15. I want you to underline this verse. It shows us the tension that the gospel is addressing. Listen to what it says, Proverbs 17:15. Listen to this: "*Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent; the LORD detests them both.*" Did you catch that? The Lord detests acquitting the guilty. Some of your translations say, "*He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, both of them are an abomination to the LORD.*" Did you catch that? If you justify, acquit the guilty, the wicked, then you are an abomination to the Lord?

Well, what is happening in salvation? God is justifying the wicked, right? God is acquitting the guilty. Well, how can God do that when that is an abomination to Him? Do you see the tension here? How can God be just and gracious toward the guilty and the wicked? How can He bring all the wealth of His attributes together? How can He bring His love and His wrath, His holiness and His mercy, His justice and His grace...how can they begin to come together when He said, "It's an abomination to justify the wicked"? This is the tension that exists in the gospel, and what Romans 3:21-26 is trying to give us a picture of. The overriding question of this passage, and the overriding question of the Bible is, "How can God be kind to rebellious sinners who are due His judgement?" How can God be kind to sinners?

Now, we don't think that's the question. I mean, think about it. How many people today are really losing sleep at night over how God can be kind to sinners? We don't lose sleep over that. Instead, we point the finger at God and say, "God, how can you punish man? God, how could you let people go to hell?" That's what inflames us. The reason is, because we have such a man-centered worldview, that we are nowhere near concerned about the glory and the character of God. The question of the Bible...because the Bible is very concerned about the character of God, the question of the Bible is, "How can God, in His justice, show kindness to sinners?" We ask, "How can God let people go to hell?" The Bible asks the question, "God, how can you let rebels into heaven? How can you let those who have belittled your glory into heaven?"

This is the tension of the gospel. You realize that God's forgiveness of us is a threat to His character. It's what He is talking about in Romans 3:25. It says, "He, in His forbearance, left the sins committed beforehand unpunished." Did you catch that? It's talking about how, up until this point, God has not poured out full judgement and wrath on sin.

Let me give you an illustration. Go back to 2 Samuel 12. David is confronted by Nathan for adultery with Bathsheba, and then murdering her husband. Nathan confronts David and says, "David, you have despised God." David looks back and says, "I have sinned against the Lord." You know how Nathan responds? Nathan responds and says, "The Lord has put away your sin." Just like that. Adultery, murder passed over, just like that. Is that just? Is that right? If any judge in our land looks at adultery and murder and says, "It can be passed over", immediately, we are throwing him off the bench. That is not just; that is not right.

**... and sent His Son, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin on the cross and to show His power over sin in the resurrection ...**

This is the dilemma posed by the gospel. How can God be both just and gracious? How can the just and gracious God of the universe look upon sinfully rebellious people and have anything for them but wrath? The answer is "the just and gracious God of the universe looked upon hopelessly sinful people and sent His Son, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh to bear His wrath on the cross and to show His power in the resurrection..." Ladies and gentlemen, Jesus is the only answer to this tension. He is the only answer to this tension.

**Jesus' life displayed the righteousness of God.**

We have rebelled against God; we are separated from God; we are dead without God. Jesus comes on the scene, and what does He do? Well, first, His life displays the righteousness of God. His life displays the righteousness of God. The problem in Romans 3 is that we have all broken the law. All of us have broken the law, and we need someone who has not broken the law, someone who fulfills the law, and Jesus comes on the scene. He is God in the flesh. He is fully man and fully God, which are both important. We leave that out of the gospel, we undercut the gospel of its power.

Sadly enough, you look at evangelistic tracts and listen to evangelistic sermons in our day, and you will hardly ever hear the humanity and deity of Christ mentioned. Have we forgotten how big a deal it is that Jesus is fully human? That He would not be able to identify with you and me if He was not fully human? Have we forgotten how big a deal it is that He is God, that only He could bear the divine weight of human sin? He must be fully human, and He must be fully God. Yet, tragically, you ask, survey, those who profess to be Christians, "Show me in Scripture where Jesus claims to be God", and we fiddle around not knowing where to go.

This is the gospel. God became a man in Jesus Christ, and His very life displayed the character of God. His very life displayed the righteousness of God. This doctrine of the humanity and deity of Christ separates, the true gospel, from false, cultic gospels. These truths separate Christianity from Islam and Judaism. It is extremely important that Jesus is fully God and fully man. His life displayed the righteousness of God.

### **Jesus' death satisfied the wrath of God.**

Second, how does Jesus solve this tension? This is where we get to the apex of the gospel. Jesus' death satisfied the wrath of God. Paul says in verse 25, "*God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement.*" That is one incredible phrase. Some of your translations say, "*God presented him as a propitiation for our sins.*" The word literally means, "God presented Him as one who would turn away the wrath of God, forgiving us of our sins." This is an incredible, thick picture of what happened at the cross. Now, I know some of you are thinking, "All right, what do you mean, that Jesus' death satisfied the wrath of God?"

Here is where I want you to think about it with me. How could Jesus' death on a wooden cross really pay the price for everyone's sins? I mean, what happened in that moment that would lead to this idea that we could be forgiven our sins because He went to a cross? What was it about that scene? This is where I want you to listen to me very, very, very closely. Don't wander off a couple of sentences into this. Just stick with me through the whole picture, okay?

We are not saved from our sins because Jesus was falsely accused by men and sentenced to death on a cross. We are not saved from our sins because Roman persecutors thrust nails into His hands and His feet. Do you really think that the false judgement of men upon Jesus would be enough to pay for all of our sin debt? Do you really think that Him having nails put in His hands and His feet was enough to pay for our sin debt? All of these things that preachers almost glamorize when it comes to crucifixion. The crown of thorns thrust into His head; the spear thrust into His side. All of these images that we see in *The Passion of the Christ*. Do you really think that all of those would pay our sin debt? Do you really think this is what Jesus was anguishing over in the garden, what caused Him to sweat blood? Because He was afraid of crucifixion? Because he was afraid of a wooden cross and Roman nails?

I mean, think about it with me. In the history of Christianity, there have been countless millions of people who have died cruel deaths. Many of them not just nailed to crosses. In the first century, they weren't just nailed to the crosses. Many Christians in the first century were nailed to the crosses and then burned there. Their bodies became lamps for the people that were walking by. Many of them went to their crosses singing. This is the testimony of countless saints throughout history. One Christian in India who was, literally, being skinned alive, and he said while he was being skinned alive, "I thank you for this. Tear off my old garment, I will soon put on Christ's garment of righteousness." Christopher Love's wife wrote to him, "Today, you will dress yourself in your wedding garment. They will sever you from your physical head, but they cannot sever you from your spiritual head, Christ", and he went to the gallows with his wife applauding him, singing in glory.

Do we really think these men and women in the past had more courage than Christ on that day, cowering in the garden? Sweating blood? Listen to what He says there; listen to what He says: "*If it is possible, let this cup pass from me.*" Ladies and gentlemen, that is not a reference to a Roman nail or a wooden cross. Look throughout the Old Testament. Isaiah 51, you see the cup of God's wrath. Jeremiah 25:15, "*A cup filled with the wine of my wrath.*" Revelation 16:19, "*A cup filled with the wine of the fury of God's wrath.*" All over Scripture, this cup is a picture filled to the brim with the wrath of God to drink.

Ladies and gentlemen, the reality is what happened at the cross was not as much about nails being thrust into the hands and feet of Christ, but it was about your sin being thrust on the Son of God. Your sin and the wrath due your sin being thrust directly onto the Son of God. The holy and righteous anger and hatred toward sin being thrust on God's only Son. This is what happened at the cross.

You say, "Hatred? What do you mean?" Yes, hatred. God loves everything that is holy and right, and, as such, He hates everything that is the opposite. Ladies and gentlemen, you and I are the opposite, and when Jesus went to that cross...and, yes, in no way do I want to minimize the physical suffering there. However, He was taking the wrath of Almighty God due you and your sin upon Himself, and preachers say that God from heaven looked down, and He had to turn away because He couldn't stand to see the suffering inflicted on His Son by those soldiers. That is not why darkness is seen at the cross. It is because God could not look upon your sin on His Son.

One preacher described it this way: It is as if you are standing in front of a dam of water 10,000 miles high and 10,000 miles wide, and it is filled to the brim. All of a sudden, in an instant, the wall of that dam is taken away, and that water begins to flood toward you. You are standing a hundred yards away, and as the water comes pouring down toward you, all of a sudden, the ground right in front of you opens up and swallows every bit of that water. The gospel is a picture of Jesus Christ taking the full cup of God's wrath and drinking every single drop of it, and when He finished that last drop, He turned over the cup, and He said, "It is finished. It is finished. My death has satisfied the wrath of God." That is good news. That is really good news.

### **Jesus' resurrection demonstrated the power of God.**

It's the gospel. God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, and, praise God, the gospel does not end there. His life displays the righteousness of God, His death satisfies the wrath of God, and third, His resurrection demonstrated the power of God. At the cross, Jesus Christ took the justice due our sin upon Himself, He vindicated the righteousness of God, and at the resurrection, God vindicated His Son, showing Him to be victorious over death and sin and the grave. His resurrection shows that God's wrath had been duly poured out, that He had conquered sin, death and the grave. He had looked death in the face and rose victorious. This is the gospel: The life, death, resurrection of Jesus Christ in response to the tension between a holy God and sinful man.

### **... so that all who have faith in Him will be reconciled to God ...**

You put all of that together, and it leads to this next phrase: "The just and gracious God of the universe looked upon hopelessly sinful people and sent His Son, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin on the cross and to show His power over sin in the resurrection so that all who have faith in Him will be reconciled to God..." "All who have faith in Him." You saw it mentioned twice in this passage. "*God presented him,*" verse 25, "*as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood...*" Get down to verse 26, "*He demonstrated his justice at the present time so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*"

### **God is the giver of the gospel.**

Now, here we are getting in to the subjective element of the gospel. How does this picture of Christ become appropriated to our lives? The answer is through faith. The next few weeks we are going to be unpacking what is involved in this saving faith. What happens when we put our faith in Christ? Suffice to say at this point three truths that we have got to realize about faith as it relates to the gospel. Number one, God is the giver of the gospel. God is the giver of the gospel.

Now, here is what I mean by that. It's back up in verse 24, "*...we are justified freely by his grace.*" Isn't that a great phrase? "*Freely by his grace...*" It's almost repetitive: "As a gift by

His gift." Freely by His grace. The word "freely" literally means "without price," "without reason," "without cause." Without price to us; without cause in us. God did not see anything in us that caused Him to respond by sending Jesus to the cross. It came completely and totally by His own initiative. He freely gives it by His grace.

In fact, what's really interesting is verse 24 says, "...and are justified..." Now, I want you to just think about the way that verb is mentioned, the way that verb is phrased. This is not active voice, this is passive voice. Now, follow me here. You are thinking, "Now why are you taking us to English class?" Just listen, and this is key. Active voice is when you do something; you do an action. "I give you something." That's active voice. Passive voice is when something is done to you. "I was given this gift." That's passive. I didn't do the giving; I was given. Somebody else did it to me.

Look at verse 24. Is it active or passive? "...and are justified..." Passive. Ladies and gentlemen, you do not justify yourself. There is absolutely nothing you can do to justify yourself. "Justified" literally means "to be declared righteous before God." There is nothing you can do, nothing you can manufacture, no amount of boxes you can check off, no amount of prayers you can pray in order to make yourself righteous before God. You can't do it. He has to do it in you. We are justified by Him. He declares us righteous. It would be like you were going to a judge and you said, "Don't worry. I've got it figured out what my payment is." The judge makes that call. He is the one who justifies. He is the one who declares righteous. God is the giver of the gospel.

### **God is the gift of the gospel.**

He declares us righteous, which leads to the second truth. Not only is God the giver of the gospel, but God is the gift of the gospel. Now, follow with me here. This is rich. God is the gift of the gospel. What does He give us in salvation? God gives us Himself. The righteousness of God, the very character of God, dominates this passage. What he is saying is, "A righteousness of God has been made known. This righteousness come by faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe." 2 Corinthians 5:21, "*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us in order that we may become the righteousness of God.*" God gives us His righteousness. He gives us Himself. God is the gift of the gospel. That's why I phrased it, "All who have faith in him will be reconciled to God." This is where the gospel is headed. This is why the gospel is good, because we come back to God. We have been separated from God; that's our problem. So, the answer is we are united to God; we are reconciled to God. God gives us Himself.

That seems almost elementary, but then, you listen to how we explain the gospel in our day, and you will hear preachers standing before people, saying, "Come to Christ so you can get forgiveness. Come to Christ so you can go to heaven. Come to Christ so that you can get satisfaction. Come to Christ so that you can get success. Come to Christ so that you can get your best life. Come to Christ so that you can get all of these things. That's blasphemy! You don't come to Christ to get all those things; you come to Christ to get God. We have taken God Himself out of salvation and offered His gifts instead of Him. It's evident because many people think they are going to heaven, but they have no relationship with God. No surrender to God. No walk with God. The gospel is a picture of God giving us Himself, and, ladies and gentlemen, you or I will not go to heaven if you don't want God.

The whole picture of the gospel is that we are united to God. Yes, all of these things flow from God: His forgiveness. Yes, heaven is an incredible thing. Yes, all of these gifts flow from God, but they come from a source. We can't be so materialistic and self-centered in our Christianity to reach for God's gifts and ignore the fact that we want God. Do you think

it's possible in our day and age to want the things of God more than we want God? You see how the gospel fundamentally shows us how God gives us Himself.

### **God is the goal of the gospel.**

He's the giver of the gospel, He is the gift of the gospel, and He is the goal of the gospel. He's the goal of the gospel. Why did Jesus go to the cross? Why did Jesus go to the cross? The immediate answer that comes to our mind is, "To save us from our sins." That is not the ultimate answer that Romans 3:21-26 is giving us. Romans 3:21-26 is not telling us that Jesus went to the cross to save us from our sins. I want you to look. There three purpose clauses that are in this passage to show us why Jesus went to the cross.

Listen to what it says. "*He did this...*" Middle of the way, verse 25. "*God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. He did this...*" Why? "*...to demonstrate his justice...*" Same thing in verse 26. "*He did it to demonstrate his justice, so as...*" Here's why. "*so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.*" God sent Jesus to the cross, ultimately, to display His character, to display His glory. Ultimately to enable God to show the full range of all of His attributes: wrath and love and mercy and grace and holiness, all of these attributes. Jesus went to the cross. We know that.

John 12, "*What shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.*" He is about to go to the cross, and He looks up, and He says in John 12:27-28, "*Father, glorify your name.*" "I go to the cross. Glorify your name." Yes, Jesus' death on the cross provides for us forgiveness. We have seen that, but ultimately, it provides for God's glory.

So, where do we fit into this picture? The reality is that all of us in this room...any one of us in this room...we could be hopelessly sinful people...we can have our lives transformed by the righteousness of God through the death of Christ on the cross and His resurrection from the grave. When we begin to bear the righteousness of God in our lives, then God gets great glory out of our salvation. God is the goal of the gospel. This is why, ladies and gentlemen, when we cheapen the gospel and relegate it to a simple act of praying, or walking an aisle or signing a card, and our lives look the same, then we rob God of the glory due His name in the gospel. God is the goal of the gospel.

**... forever.**

### **The risk ...**

All of that leads to this last word. We will be reconciled to God forever. This is where I want to bring this passage to a point and remind you that your eternity man, woman, child, student in this room...your eternity is based on this gospel and your response to this gospel. I want to remind you of a risk and a reality. First, the risk. Ladies and gentlemen, we can know all of these truths and still not be saved. You can know all about God and all about Jesus and all about the cross and the resurrection. You can know all about Him coming back; you can know all the details of Jesus' life, and you can know all about these things that we have mentioned. You can know all of these things and still not be saved. Demons know all of these things.

I am in no way trying to complicate the gospel. Some of you think, "Well, doesn't it say in Scripture, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.?' " Yes, no question it says that in Scripture. However, it is obvious in Scripture that that belief is more than just intellectual

acknowledgement of facts. You can know all of these things today and still be headed to eternity separated from God.

### **The reality ...**

Which brings us to the reality: Our eternal destiny hinges on a biblical response to this gospel. On a biblical response to this gospel. This is where we are addressing some of the language and the methods and the traditions that we are using today to describe our response the gospel that don't square with Scripture. We wonder, and we ask the question, "Well, then, how do we get salvation? If being justified is God's declaration of being righteous, and you can't pay for it because it's free, and you can't work for it because it's grace, then how do you get this justification? How do you get declared righteous by God?" The answer is not to recite words, sign cards or talk to somebody at the front. That's not the answer. That's not how you get justification. The way to get justification is not to do any of these things. It is for you to go and throw yourself at the feet of Almighty God with absolutely nothing in your hands. Nothing. Absolutely nothing to your credit. No prayers to your credit, no work to your credit. Having thrown aside the check off list that you are looking for to make sure you are saved. Throw it aside and go to God and call out to Him. This is how we are saved: Through open hands of faith. This is how we are justified, how He declares us righteous. Not through anything we bring to the table, but through the gospel. We have seen here everything that Christ brought to the table, and it is absolute and total ruthless trust and surrender to Him.

This is the gospel. This is saving faith. We are going to unpack it more in the coming weeks, but I want you to see it. Because I am convinced that seeing this objective picture of the gospel that even now, in this moment, the Spirit of God is using this gospel...the objective gospel in Romans 3:21-26...to draw hearts all across this room to Himself. I want to encourage you...I want to encourage you to yield completely and totally. Stop trying to do anything. Stop trying to look for what you can do to measure up. Yield completely to Him. Plead for Him to save you. Stay on your face before Him day and night until he declares you righteous.

You look throughout the history of Christianity, and you will see...you will see men and women who wrestled for days and nights over their sinfulness. Even Whitefield and Wesley, who I mentioned earlier, would constantly...David Brainerd, who I was reading this last week, would constantly come to God asking for grace, but he would realize he still had selfish motives in him. He still has the desire to earn grace, and he would constantly ask God, "Purge me of this. Purge me of this." God brought him to that point of salvation.

It's William Cowper, 1759, when he was 28 years old. William Cowper had struggled with depression. He had tried to commit suicide three different times. He was so overwhelmed by his sin. He was committed St. Albans insane asylum. He found a Bible sitting there, six months into his time in the insane asylum, and he came to Romans 3:25. He read these words that we have just read this morning: "*God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood...*" Listen to what he later wrote. He said, "Immediately, I received the strength to believe it, and the full beams of the Son of righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement he had made for me. I saw my pardon sealed in his blood and the fullness and completeness of his justification. In a moment I believed and I received the gospel."

Cowper lived 35 more years, during the time he penned the words of this great hymn:

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins,  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day,  
And there may I though vile as he, wash all my sins away.

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood, will never lose it's power,  
til all the ransomed church of God be saved to sin no more.  
'Ere since by faith I saw the stream thy flowing wounds supply.  
Redeeming love has been my theme and shall be 'til I die.

It's the picture, ladies and gentlemen, of John Brokaw. Who, this time last year, seemed healthy by all accounts, only to find out later that he had lung cancer. I sat with John in his home a couple of weeks ago, and he looked at me, and he said, "David, I have discovered that religion is hollow. I used to be satisfied with superficial religious activity, but that doesn't get you through cancer. Only a relationship with Christ gets you through cancer." He talked about how Christ has been his strength and his peace and his sustenance. Yesterday, in his home, John Brokaw breathed his last breath. Immediately, he found himself in the presence of God the Judge who looked at John and said, "John, by what right do you stand before me now." John said, "I have nothing. I have nothing. Nothing but the righteousness of Christ." God looked at John Brokaw and said, "Welcome home."

This is the gospel. Do you know the gospel and have you responded biblically to the gospel? I want to urge you this morning. I urge you this morning to cast your heart for God. Let your pride down, cast your heart before God and call out, cry out for Him to save you from your sins by the work of Christ on the cross. Call out, cry out for Him to declare you righteous. "God, make me righteous. I cannot do it." Hear Him say, "By the sacrifice of my Son and the resurrection of my Son from the grave, I declare that you are spotless, you are righteous, you are faultless, you are blameless, you are mine by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ." This is the gospel. By the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, you are not guilty anymore.

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

**Please include the following statement on any distributed copy:** By David Platt. © David Platt & Radical. Website: [Radical.net](http://Radical.net)