

Message: Romans 3:21-26

Message Date: September 21, 2025

Summary of the Sermon:

What does it truly mean to be made right with God? Romans 3:21-26 pulls back the curtain on one of the most breathtaking truths in all of Scripture: that despite our universal condition as sinners who fall short of God's glory, there exists a righteousness we could never earn on our own, offered freely to all who place their faith in Jesus Christ. This passage marks a dramatic turning point, moving us from the sobering reality of our need to the stunning generosity of God's answer. We explore what it means to be justified, not by anything we do, but by what God has already done, crediting Christ's perfect righteousness to our account the moment we believe. The good news is not just that we are forgiven, but that we are declared right before a holy God, completely and freely. As we unpack words like redemption, propitiation, and justification, we discover they are not dry theological terms but living descriptions of a God who loved us enough to meet every demand of justice on our behalf. This message invites us to examine where our faith truly rests and to experience the freedom that comes from trusting not in ourselves, but in the One who lived perfectly and died sacrificially for us.

Title: But Now: The Good News of God's Righteousness

Sermon Summary:

This sermon marks a pivotal turn in the book of Romans, moving from the "bad news" of universal human sinfulness and condemnation to the "good news" of God's gracious provision of salvation through Jesus Christ. Drawing from Romans 3:21-26, the pastor unpacks the rich theological vocabulary of the gospel, including righteousness, justification, redemption, imputation, and propitiation, to demonstrate that God has made a way for all people to be made right with Him through faith in Jesus Christ alone. Because all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory, God sent His Son to live a perfect life, die as a full and satisfying payment for sin, and rise again, freely offering His righteousness to all who believe. God accomplished this while maintaining His own perfect justice and integrity, demonstrating His righteousness by requiring a perfect sacrifice rather than simply lowering His standard.

Key Points:

- The book of Romans transitions at chapter 3:21 from the bad news of universal human sinfulness to the good news of God's provision of salvation, marked by the pivotal phrase "but now"
- Five key theological terms define what God has done for believers: righteousness, justification, redemption, imputation, and propitiation
- The righteousness God offers is His own righteousness, entirely apart from human effort or law-keeping, and is received through faith in Jesus Christ alone
- Salvation is available to all people without exception because all have equally sinned and fallen short of God's glory
- God justifies believers freely by His grace, meaning the act of being made righteous is entirely God's doing upon the believer, not the believer's own achievement
- Jesus' death served as a full and satisfying payment (propitiation) for sin, paying the ransom price (redemption) to free humanity from slavery to sin
- God demonstrated His righteousness and integrity through the cross by upholding His own standard of perfection rather than simply overlooking sin

- In the Old Testament era, God passed over the sins of faithful believers in anticipation of Christ's future payment, which is why Old Testament saints awaited Christ's death before entering God's full presence
- The only human responsibility in salvation is faith, trusting in Jesus Christ and what He has accomplished rather than in one's own goodness or sincerity
- Believers are called to share this gospel freely with everyone, since it is available to all

Scripture Reference:

- Romans 3:21-26, the primary passage, presents the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ as the answer to universal human sinfulness
- Romans 3:20 serves as the closing statement of the bad news section, establishing that no one is justified by keeping the law
- Isaiah 64:6 describes human righteousness as filthy rags in comparison to God's holiness
- Hebrews 7 and 10 are referenced to show that the law made nothing perfect but pointed forward to Christ as the better hope

Stories:

- A scientist discovering a cure for cancer is used to illustrate how the bad news of sin must be understood before the good news of salvation can be fully appreciated, just as a cancer cure means little to someone who has never experienced its devastation
- The California Redemption Value bottle deposit system is used to illustrate the concept of redemption, in that items are bought back to be returned to their intended purpose, just as Christ bought humanity back from sin to restore relationship with God
- A home mortgage being paid off in full by someone else is used to illustrate propitiation, the full and satisfying final payment that Jesus made for sin
- A drowning person refusing a life preserver because they want a different one is used to illustrate the foolishness of rejecting Christ as the only way of salvation
- The Old Testament Passover feast is referenced as a yearly reminder that God would pass over sin on the basis of the blood of a sacrifice, pointing forward to Christ
- The imagery of an archer missing a bullseye is used to explain the Greek word for sin, meaning to miss the mark of God's perfect standard
- A person using a credit card to obtain goods without yet paying is used to illustrate how God passed over the sins of Old Testament believers in anticipation of Christ's future payment

Discussion Questions:

Day 1:

The sermon describes the 'bad news' of sin as necessary for appreciating the 'good news' of salvation — in what ways has a deeper understanding of your own sinfulness made the grace of God more meaningful to you personally?

Romans 3:22 states that the righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe — what does it mean in your daily life to actively place your trust in Christ rather than in your own moral efforts or good intentions?

Day 2:

The pastor explains that the law was designed to reveal our sinfulness and point us to Christ rather than to save us — how does understanding this purpose of the law change the way you read and apply the Old Testament to your life?

The concept of imputation means that Christ's perfect righteousness is credited to our account the moment we believe — how does this truth challenge or reshape the way you think about your identity before God on your worst days?

Day 3:

The sermon draws a distinction between being sincere and being sincerely right in what your faith is placed in — have you ever examined whether your trust is genuinely in Christ alone, or whether it is subtly mixed with confidence in your own character or religious effort?

Propitiation means that Christ made a full and final satisfying payment for sin — how does grasping the completeness of that payment affect the way you approach God when you struggle with guilt or repeated failure?

Day 4:

The pastor notes that God demonstrated His righteousness by requiring that sin be fully paid for rather than simply overlooking it — what does this tell you about the character of God, and how does it deepen your appreciation for what Christ endured on the cross?

Romans 3:23 reminds us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God — in what practical ways can keeping this truth in view guard you against spiritual pride or a judgmental attitude toward those who do not yet know Christ?

Day 5:

The sermon describes how Old Testament believers were saved by faith in a coming Messiah while their sins were 'passed over' until Christ's sacrifice — how does this continuity of salvation by faith across both covenants strengthen your confidence in the reliability and consistency of God's redemptive plan?

The pastor closes by challenging believers to share this message of salvation freely with others — what specific obstacles, whether fear, indifference, or uncertainty, might be keeping you from telling someone in your life about the good news of justification through Christ?

Practical Applications

For Those Still Exploring Faith

If you have never placed your faith in Jesus Christ, this passage is a direct invitation. The righteousness God requires is not something you can earn -- it is something He freely gives to all who believe. If you have questions or want to talk through what it means to trust Christ, bring those to your group leader or pastor this week.

For Believers

- **Examine your confidence.** Spend time this week asking yourself honestly: where is my trust? Is it in my performance, my sincerity, or in what Christ has done? Let Romans 3:21-26 recalibrate your assurance.
- **Memorize a key phrase.** Choose one term from the sermon -- justification, redemption, propitiation, or imputation -- and commit its meaning to memory so you can explain it clearly to someone else.
- **Share the good news.** The sermon closed with a challenge to share this message with everyone. Identify one specific person this week with whom you can share what God has done for you. Pray for an open door and the boldness to walk through it.

Looking Ahead

Next week the sermon will continue through Romans 3 and into chapter 4, exploring more of what God has done for us in Christ. As you prepare, read Romans 3:27 through Romans 4:25 and pay attention to how many times the words "faith" and "believe" appear. Consider what God might be emphasizing by repeating those words so frequently.