

God's Justice, God's Mercy

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. And it's my joy to bring God's word to you today.

A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it. Which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word.

This morning we're continuing our series in the book of Romans. And you'll remember that Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s AD. And it is called Romans for a very simple reason, which is that Paul writes it as a letter to the churches in the city of Rome.

This letter is about the gospel. It's about the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. And Paul's hope, as he stated back in chapter 1, is that these churches would be established in the gospel.

[1 : 16] And we'll see, as we already have, many applications as we go throughout this letter. But we'll also see that Paul is especially concerned with the mission and the unity of the church.

And while there are many spokes, we will go off exploring all sorts of topics. We will constantly be returning back to the hub of the gospel. Now, I think I mentioned this a couple weeks ago.

We are nearing the end of this section of Romans. And we're going to take the book of Romans, this letter, in chunks. And so next week, we're going to finish chapter 3.

And when we finish chapter 3, we're going to break. And we're going to do some other things. We probably will not return to chapter 4 of the book of Romans until sometime, maybe middle to fall of 2025.

So I just don't want you guys to be caught off guard next week when I say, hey, this is our last sermon in Romans. And so we're coming to the end of this three-chapter argument that Paul's been making.

[2 : 16] Remember, I've been telling you that it's summed up in verse 23, which we looked at last week. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Paul's been looking at this from every angle.

He's been turning the diamond to make sure that we have no excuse, no way that we could refute his proposition, his claim here.

And so now that we're at the end, we've come finally to the good news. Paul is proving this over and over so that he can say what also appears in verse 23 from last week.

No, verse 24. And are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. In other words, Paul has been preparing us to hear the good news of the gospel.

And so it's with that I invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 4, verses 25 and 26. This is two verses, and it might not seem like much. They're actually quite dense and rich.

[3 : 17] And so we're going to go through them the same way Andy went through the previous verses last week. We're going to just go through them step by step. Okay, I'm going to go through it systematically through these two texts.

And as you hear me say, oh, this is rich and dense, you might be thinking, oh no, what are we about to get ourselves into? And so I'll also provide you some encouragement. Pastor Martin Lloyd-Jones, who is famous for his decade-plus-long exposition in the book of Romans, says this about verses 25 and 26.

In many senses, there are no more important verses in the whole range and realm of Scripture than these two verses. And so we're going to see why he says that this morning. Very simple truths. We'll see God's mercy and his wrath. Most of all, we're going to see the gospel. Simple, full, and free. And so I invite you to turn with me now to Romans chapter 3, starting at verse 25.

You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your Bible. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word.

[4 : 27] In Proverbs 30, verse 5 tells us, Every word of God proves true. He is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

And so that's why we read now Romans chapter 3, starting at verse 25. Whom God put forward as a 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 how he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you as we do every week that you have given us these words, your words. That you speak to us, that you haven't left us to figure out life on our own. And we confess as we come to your word this morning that both the speaker and the hearers are feeble and frail and faltering.

[5 : 41] That we lack many things. That our minds don't work as they should. Our hearts are often dry and hard when they should be soft and open.

And so really we confess this morning that we need your help as we do every day. So we ask that you would pour out your Holy Spirit among us now this morning in a special way.

And that you would use it in spite of us. To show us the great glory and beauty of Jesus Christ. And we ask these things in his mighty name. Amen.

Amen. You might be a little bit annoyed when I read this. Because you saw verse 25 begins with the word whom.

Which is probably not how you like your sentences to begin. And in fact you might be wondering who whom. Who in the world are we talking about here? We are in fact picking up mid-sentence.

[6 : 40] Although some people believe this should be a new sentence. From what Andy showed us in verse 24. And verse 24 basically says this. Look you're saved and you are saved by Jesus.

And so that whom in verse 25 is simply referring back to Jesus. So verse 24. You're saved by Jesus. Verse 25. Let's learn more about Jesus and this salvation.

The very first thing we learn about Jesus and his salvation. Is that he is the one whom God put forward. And so I want us to pause for a second.

Even as we're just beginning. And think about this question. What does it mean to be a good father? What does it mean to be a good father?

You might think of a number of things. We could go on for a long time. It could involve talking about planning. About discipline. About sacrifice for the good of a son or a daughter.

[7 : 50] The very first thing Paul tells us in this verse when it comes to Jesus. Is that the plan of salvation was the plan of God the Father.

The plan of salvation was the plan of God the Father. Now if you're familiar with the Christian faith. You know that we speak about the Trinity. Which is that God is a one God in three persons.

And there's a unity right? Because there's one God. There's a unity of purpose and direction and action. But different parts of the Trinity. The different persons play different roles.

Jesus was the one who died. Not God the Father. So Paul is telling us. That when it comes to God's plan to save his people.

God the Father was the initiator. God the Father was the one who set out the plan. And so there's unity.

[9 : 00] Right? One God, three persons. And there's distinction. There's distinction in what it is they do. In accomplishing redemption. Remember.

What Paul teaches. Jesus taught first. So you'll remember Jesus' words from Mark chapter 14. This is Jesus talking to his Father.

Abba Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will. But what you will. First John tells us.

This is speaking about God the Father. We love because he first loved us. Brothers and sisters, the point is this.

Jesus did not die to convince God the Father to love you. Jesus did not die to convince God the Father to love you.

[10:07] No. God the Father sent Jesus because he already did. God the Father sent Jesus because he already did.

So the application for us is this. We give thanks to God for how good and generous and loving of a father he is.

We thank God for how good and generous and loving of a father he is. The gospel is the news of the world is destroying itself over sin.

That's part of what we've seen in chapters 1 through 3. The gospel also tells us that the one person who is most offended and hurt by sin, that is God himself, is the one who comes and cleans it up. Whom God put forward. God did not see something good in you and then decide to save you.

[11:22] No, God saw you in the mess and destruction of your sin and came to clean it up.

What a great father. We might think of the words of Psalm 103, as a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.

Now, I don't know what your earthly father was like or is like. Maybe he found other things much more interesting than you.

Maybe he was characterized by selfishness rather than selflessness. Maybe he was amazing and loving and kind.

And yet in that he was flawed and imperfect as every father is. But he pointed to a picture of our heavenly father.

[12:38] We're in the season of Advent now, which is the celebration of Jesus' first coming. And why did Jesus have a first coming?

Verse 25, because God put him forward. We find out the same thing in John 3, verse 16.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. It's important for us to see God's love in that, because now Paul's going to immediately turn to God's wrath.

Same verse, verse 25. Okay, God put him forward. He sent him. What did he send him to do? As a propitiation by his blood.

Now, I'm sure that most of you use the word propitiation on a daily basis, but I'm afraid there's a few of you here today that do not.

[13:53] So I'm going to ask those of you who use it all the time to be patient as I explain it.

Propitiation, I joke, is a technical theological term, which means this, according to John Stott, to propitiate someone means to appease or pacify his anger.

So to propitiate is to satisfy the wrath of God. Another person puts it this way. Propitiation is when Jesus turns God's wrath against us into favor.

Propitiation, Jesus turns God's wrath against us into favor. We're getting then to what we don't like to talk about and what many people find offensive about the Christian faith, the Christian idea of God, is that God would somehow have wrath.

Why would we want to serve a God who has wrath and anger in this way? In fact, doesn't that sound like something that's beneath God or below him?

And when we do that, often we confuse the idea of the triune God, the God of the Bible, with what we learn about other gods that we're told about in history. So people often think about the Greek gods that we see in the Iliad.

[15:11] Their feelings are easily hurt. They're capricious. They need to be bribed or bought off. They need their egos stroked. And so when we hear the word wrath, we often think of that.

Oh, God is like, the God of the Bible is like those gods. He's easily angered. He needs his ego stroked. He needs to be bought off somehow. No.

God's wrath is very, very different. The wrath of the God of the Bible is very different than the wrath of any other God. God's wrath is his focused, clear, principled opposition to evil.

God's wrath is his stance towards everything that is wrong with this world. You'll see this on the back of your worship guide.

The wrath of God is his steady, unrelenting, unremitting, uncompromising antagonism to evil in all its forms and manifestations.

[16:27] In short, God's anger is poles apart from ours. What provokes our anger, injured vanity, never provokes his.

What provokes his evil seldom provokes ours. God has wrath because God hates what is evil in this world.

Would you want any other type of God? A woman named Becky Pippert in her book, Hope Has Its Reason, says this, God's wrath is not a cranky explosion.

A cranky explosion, what we would expect of other gods, of pagan gods, of the Greek gods. Not a cranky explosion, but his settled opposition to the cancer, which is eating out the insides of the human race he loves with his whole being.

God's wrath is his settled opposition to the cancer, which is eating out the insides of the human race he loves.

[17:51] God hates evil. And not only does God hate evil, he's determined to do something about it. What Paul teaches, Jesus taught first.

Remember Jesus' words from Matthew chapter 10. Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

I told you earlier, we give thanks for how loving and good and generous God is. And now I'm going to tell you something that might sound a little counterintuitive.

We give thanks for God's wrath. Because his wrath means this, he refuses to let evil win.

We give thanks for God's wrath. We give thanks for God's wrath. We give thanks for God's wrath.

Because he refuses to let evil win.

[19:07] Paul goes on to tell us, not just that he destroys the cancer that's eating the inside of the human race. He tells us how God does this.

Same verse, verse 25. By his blood. By his blood reminds us that sin has a price, has a cost.

And that cost is death. It's the same thing Paul's going to tell us later on. Romans chapter 6. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And what Paul teaches, Jesus taught first. Matthew chapter 20. Even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

We praise God for how good and generous and great a father he is. We praise him for his wrath.

[20:19] Because he refuses to let evil win. Verse 25 continues and says this.

This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins. That's a strange sentence.

You might be wondering, wait, I thought that God punishes every sin. What does it mean that he passed over sins? We'll start at the beginning. It says it's to show God's righteousness.

Here it's talking about God's character. And so Paul is telling us God is the most just. There is no one who is more just or more righteous than God.

But here's the catch. And this is what he's referring to when he says he had passed over former sins. The former sins is referring to the sins of God's people in the Old Testament.

[21:19] God forgave the sins of his people in the Old Testament. In other words, he passed over them. But Jesus had not yet died.

Okay, so if Jesus doesn't die and these sins have been forgiven, something's wrong. God has not been a just judge, if that's true, because he's let someone off with no one being punished.

One theologian explains it this way. Think of the sins of God's people of the Old Testament as being put on a credit card. When Jesus died, the credit card was paid off.

Those sins were forgiven in the Old Testament, looking forward to Christ. The sacrifices did not pay for them. Okay, the Old Testament sacrifices pointed forward to something else.

When Christ died, the sins of God's people in the Old Testament, the punishment was paid in full.

The point is this.

[22:38] God will pay for what he has bought. God will pay for what he has bought, and that shows his righteousness.

That's simply what Paul is saying here. He's saying when we look at God, this is the kind of God he is. He's impartial, he's fair, he's just. He doesn't say, some people receive punishment for their sins and others don't.

He doesn't say, well, people in the Old Testament could be forgiven, they didn't need Jesus to die, but now people in the Old Testament need Jesus to die. No, Paul is saying, no matter what angle we take in looking at God the Father, he is perfectly and fully just.

In our Old Testament reading that Scott read for us, Exodus chapter 12, it's the image of God's people leaving Egypt, and the firstborn of every family is killed, except for the houses that have blood on the doorpost.

What Paul is saying is that that blood on the doorpost, that was monopoly money. Jesus' death was the real money.

[23 : 54] That blood merely represented what was true and real, the death of Christ. John chapter one, what does John the Baptist say when he sees Jesus?

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Larger point is this.

God doesn't play favorites. God is not a judge who gives some people, lets some people off easy and then gives others harsher punishments.

No, God is completely and ruthlessly fair. That's what Paul's going to go on to tell us in verse 26. 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.

And Paul's simply saying this, God is not a corrupt judge. He is perfectly just in everything he does. And so every sin is going to be paid for in some way.

[25 : 15] It will be paid for by the person who committed it or it will be paid for by Jesus. And because every sin will be paid for, those of God's people in the Old Testament, those of God's people in the New Testament, and those who do not believe in Christ who will receive the punishment themselves, we can say nothing about God except he is just.

And so what Paul wants us to see here is the character of God. It's the character of God that holds the world together. You'll see this on page 8 of your worship guide.

The moral fabric of the universe would tear in pieces if God were not fair. The moral fabric of the universe would tear into pieces if God were not fair.

It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just, he might be the ultimate fair judge and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Brothers and sisters, this is the only option. Without this, we have two bad options. We can have a God of mercy but no justice. And we can have a God of justice but no mercy.

[26 : 42] The only way to have a God of justice and mercy is for every sin to be paid for. To be paid by the one who does it or if we're paid for by Jesus.

We might even put it this way in the words of Psalm 85. Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him that glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness meet. Righteousness and peace kiss each other. That's what Paul is saying here.

God is just. He's the only one who can make righteousness and peace kiss. Because he doesn't play favorites.

He's the great and just judge. We gave thanks to God because he's a good and generous and kind father.

[27 : 45] We give thanks to God for his wrath because it means evil will not win. We give thanks to God for his justice because it holds our world together.

Recently I was talking to a friend and we were talking about some things that had happened in the church at large that probably should not have happened.

And he said this. They will talk to God about that one day and that gives me a lot of comfort. They will talk to God about that one day and that gives me a lot of comfort.

God is just. And so we can trust him and praise him. Paul says one other thing here that shows up in both verses.

Verse 25. This propitiation is not for everyone. Jesus does not satisfy God's wrath on behalf of every person in this world.

[28 : 57] No, he does it for those who are received, who receive it by faith. It's a propitiation to be received by faith. And then he goes on to say the same thing in verse 26.

He's just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Jesus receives God's wrath on behalf on behalf of those and only those who have faith in him.

I was talking to someone who's not a Christian recently and I explained the gospel in one of my favorite ways to help people understand which is this. First of all, I start with what it is that we all agree about.

And I said, look, you and I both agree we all agree that something's wrong with this world. No one is going to make the claim that this world operates as it should.

Okay, we all recognize there's something broken, there's something off. We all see that there's evil. So that's what we agree about. What we disagree about is what the problem is and what the solution is.

[30 : 11] That's what we disagree about. And we actually all have answers to that. We all have answers to what we think the real problem is and what we think the solution is. And the gospel tells us what the problem is and it tells us what the solution is.

And it tells us the problem is us. What is the problem in this world? All of us in this room. And it tells us that our problem is so great that we cannot solve it ourselves.

We can't look to what other people look to. We can't look to politicians. We can't look to progress in laws. We can't look to entertainers.

We can't look to universities or the right teaching because we're not powerful enough to fix ourselves. We actually need someone more powerful.

We need a divine solution. And so Paul is telling us that exact thing here. we're the problem and what is God's solution?

[31 : 20] It is his wrath. That is how evil is destroyed once and for all. But here's the catch. It's not just his wrath on the world.

It's his wrath on Jesus Christ. And so, we can live in God's new and perfect world if Jesus took the wrath for us.

That's the question for every single person. Are you covered by his blood? God's wrath is God the justifier of you?

Did Jesus receive God's wrath on your behalf? That's our hope and our only hope. It's your only hope if you're a Christian.

It's your only hope if you're religious. It's your only hope if you're not religious. The question is this. Will you receive it? You must receive it by faith if you want to be covered by the blood.

[32 : 38] And so, that's why we sing now. What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Let's pray. Our Father in Heaven, we do thank you and praise you for your great provision in Jesus Christ who took the punishment that we deserve, who satisfied your wrath on the cross and we thank you for your wrath because it means that you refuse to let evil win.

That you will destroy the cancer that is eating the insides of the human race. We ask that you would be at work in our lives in a powerful way that we would see and recognize and trust and believe and follow you and you alone.

And we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.