

# The Oracles of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] 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 the book of Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s AD. And it's called Romans for a very simple reason, which is that Paul writes it to the churches that are in the city of Rome.

It is a letter that is about the gospel. It's about the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. And Paul's hope in writing this letter, as we saw back in chapter 1, is that these churches would be established in the gospel.

There will be many applications as we go throughout this letter. And Paul is especially focused with the mission and the unity of the church. And as I've told you many times now, we will have all kinds of little spokes, right?

We're going to go on little adventures. One of them is this morning. And we will constantly return back to the hub of the gospel. We are in the section of chapters 1 through 3, which are making one very simple argument.

[ 1 : 14 ] And that argument is summed up later in this chapter when Paul says, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So Paul's making one big point.

He's saying everyone's a sinner. Everyone deserves God's judgment. Chapter 1, Gentiles, or we might say non-religious people, deserve God's judgment. Chapter 2, Jews, or we might say today, religious people deserve God's judgment.

Chapter 3, which we begin this morning, Paul's going to bring his argument to a full conclusion. If you've been with us, you know that Paul is coming at this idea from all different angles.

He's trying to get it from every possible side, answering all sorts of objections. So two weeks ago, we said, look, the law, having access to the scriptures, is not going to save you.

Last week, we said having circumcision is not going to save you. This week, Paul's going to respond to the new objection that's come from the last two weeks. If those things can't save you, what is the point?

[ 2 : 21 ] If being in church, if baptism, if scripture is not going to save me, why am I here? What are we doing?

It's with that question, we turn now to Romans chapter 3, starting at verse 1. I invite you to turn with me. You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn in your Bible. You can turn on your phone.

No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And Proverbs chapter 30, verse 5 tells us, Every word of God is 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 1. Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?

Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

[ 3 : 26 ] Our Father in heaven, we do thank you and praise you again this morning that you haven't abandoned us and left us to figure out life on our own. But instead, you've spoken to us and you've spoken clearly in your word.

And so we ask that you would do that again this morning. You would do what you've promised to do in Isaiah 55, that your word will not return void to you, but it will accomplish great things in the lives of your people.

And so we ask that you would do that. You would use these words in Romans chapter 3 to accomplish great things in our lives. Most of all, we ask that you would show us Jesus, that we would see his beauty and his glory and his power and his authority, his mercy and his grace and his love more than ever before.

And we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Many of you know that I was ordained as a pastor in May of 2018.

And to become a pastor in our denomination, this Presbyterian denomination, you have to be examined by the regional church. And so for us, that means you're examined by the churches in Montana and Colorado and Wyoming.

[ 4 : 40 ] And one of the tests that you have to take as you're being examined is a Bible knowledge test. And they're asking this question, does this person know enough about the scriptures to be trusted to be a pastor?

And when you take that exam, there are some harder questions that are meant to sort of push you to the limits of your knowledge. And there are also some easier questions. There are some softball questions.

And the softball questions are meant to, you know, help you get some points on your exam and not feel completely defeated. One of my friends, who's a pastor here in town in Colorado Springs, got ordained at the very same time that I did, the exact same meeting of our presbytery.

And he, in his exam, he missed this question that I'm about to tell you. It was not a hard question. It was a softball question. Okay, so here it is.

In the book of Daniel, chapter three, King Nebuchadnezzar takes the prophet Daniel and he throws Daniel into a fiery furnace.

[ 5 : 42 ] And when he throws Daniel into a fiery furnace, he throws three other men in with him. What are the names of those men?

And how you respond to that question reveals something about where or how or whether you grew up in the church. If you did not grow up in the church, you might be thinking right now, wow, that's a really weird question.

And why do I care what the names of the three men were who were thrown into the fiery furnace with Daniel? Of what use is that to anyone? If you did grow up in the church, the answer is what?

Yeah, everyone knows that, right? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And so the committee examining my friend was shocked.

How in the world could this man make it through his preparations as a pastor, get to his exam and not know about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? And so he said this to them.

[ 6 : 48 ] I never watched Veggie Tales or did Bible stories in Sunday school because I didn't know Christians as a kid.

My friend didn't grow up in the church. He didn't become a Christian until he was in college. He didn't grow up going to Sunday school learning about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Had he read that story? Yes. Did he pay attention to those names? Not at all. Right? Were they critical to him? He didn't realize that. He didn't realize he was supposed to know that.

I tell you that story because the initial point of this passage from Paul is this. One of the privileges of growing up in the church is knowing the word of God.

One of the privileges of growing up in the church is knowing the word of God. Remember last week we talked about the fact that signs, religious signs, religious symbols, religious activity will not save us.

[ 8 : 02 ] Those things are not our hope. And so after hearing that, you might be thinking, that's great. Okay, Matthew. Then why are we here? If religious signs and symbols and activities don't get us to where we need to go, what are we doing?

You can imagine the Jews reading the end of chapter two and they're thinking, okay, Paul, what's the point? If circumcision doesn't save, why are we doing it?

If the law doesn't save, why are we reading it? You might think, okay, Matthew, you told me last week going to church isn't going to save me.

Great. I'll go to a coffee shop on Sunday morning. I didn't realize I didn't need to be here. I'm so glad that's over with. You told me reading the law would not change my heart.

That's great. I don't need to read my Bible anymore. It's a work of the Spirit, so I can just move on. I suddenly have more time in my schedule. The Jews reading this would be asking this, did God make a mistake by introducing circumcision?

[ 9 : 13 ] Has God changed in some way? We thought this was really important. It was so important, in fact, that God almost killed Abraham at one point for failing to circumcise one of his kids.

And now you're saying it doesn't matter? What are we supposed to do with that? And so that's the question that's being raised here in verse one.

Then what advantage has the Jew or what is the value of circumcision? You just told us religious signs and symbols and activity don't save.

So what's their point? And Paul tells them immediately, he has a first answer in verse two. Much in every way, to begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God.

And when he says the oracles of God here, Paul is referring to the Old Testament. What was the benefit of being a Jew? Easy.

[ 10 : 17 ] You had access to the Bible. You knew things that no other nation knew. You will reveal things about God that the Canaanites were not given.

You had insider information. One of the privileges of growing up in the church is knowing the word of God.

Yeah, it doesn't save. And it's one of, Paul even seems to suggest here, might be for the Jews the greatest blessing that they have.

And so I'm just gonna pause for a minute and say a few things. First, kids, do not take for granted the blessing it is that your parents bring you here every Sunday.

parents, do not miss what a huge deal it is to teach your kids the oracles of God.

[ 11 : 34 ] Don't forget how important it is. it doesn't matter if your children are admitted into Harvard if they do not know the word of God.

It doesn't matter if your kids have wild professional success if they do not know the gospel.

I'm not saying those things don't matter. I'm not saying they're not important. I'm not saying they're bad goals. What I am saying is this.

They are not as important as knowing the very words of God. What advantage has the Jew?

Much in every way. church what we do in Sunday school and nursery and youth group really matters.

[ 12 : 52 ] We are giving our children one of the greatest blessings. I've said this before and I'll say it again.

My parents like all parents were flawed and imperfect. And my parents also got two really basic really fundamental things right.

They stayed married and they took us to church every single Sunday. And in the midst of imperfection and mistakes and failures as all parents do those things matter tremendously.

Now I've been focusing on kids for the last couple minutes. Of course what Paul is saying here is true of all of us.

What we do here together every Sunday, what we do throughout the week in our small groups, in our Bible studies, those things really matter.

[ 13 : 58 ] don't underestimate the power of being exposed to the preaching of God's word week after week after week.

Don't miss what a great privilege it is to be told about the gospel year after year after year.

It might be more important than anything else. One pastor says this, there is no higher privilege that can come to any human being than to be spoken to directly by God.

And that's what Paul is saying here. What advantage was it for you to be a Jew? Of so much advantage. You had what many other nations, what no other nation had, the very words of God.

God. Now if you're a devil's advocate, you might be asking, why?

[ 15 : 31 ] Why is it so important to have the very words of God? Why does it matter that your friend did not know about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego?

That doesn't seem like a helpful piece of information that I need to spend years of time in God's word to know. No, either one, I don't need to know that, or I can know that in a minute, right?

Maybe your friend just needed an extra flashcard, right? It's not that he missed out on something by not being part of God's people. No, he missed out on some random, unhelpful, unuseful trivia.

Of course, I tell you, I told you that story. It's just an example, right? A funny example of things that we take for granted that we know if we grew up in the church, but are not actually obvious.

Actually, you're going to be okay if you don't know about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. You might not be okay, though, if you don't know about some other things. There are many advantages to God's word.

[ 16 : 39 ] Scott already read some of them this morning for us from Psalm chapter 1. What does it tell us? God's word brings great flourishing. The person who steeps himself in that is the person who has great life.

And so what did the Jews have? They had this manual for life that no one else had access to. God's promises. Even more than that, they had God's promises.

What is the Old Testament filled with if not the promises of God? They knew things like this. Genesis chapter 12.

In you, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. Christ. They knew that God was at work in the world in a special way. They knew this from Jeremiah chapter 31.

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel. I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

[ 17 : 59 ] The Jews had the promise of God's presence. They knew that whatever was happening in that moment was not the end of the story. They knew this promise from Ezekiel chapter 36.

And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

The Jews had the very promises of God. You'll see this on page seven of your worship guide. The greatest thing of all was the fact that through these oracles of God the Jews were given a hope.

The hope of the coming of the Messiah. The other nations had no hope at all but Israel had a hope.

There was a great deliverer to come. It was a light in the darkness. They alone had it. What a privilege.

[ 19 : 19 ] church. They didn't just have the promises of God.

They had something even more important than that. The Old Testament revealed to God's people two things. It showed them their great need for the gospel.

It revealed to them that they were without hope except for a savior. showed them their need. And it also told them that there was a solution.

It told them their need in places like Jeremiah chapter 2. For my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters.

broken and they've hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. The Old Testament said, look, you are looking for life in all the wrong places.

[ 20 : 29 ] Humanity is lost. It cannot save itself. And they knew there was hope from places like this. Isaiah chapter 43. But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, fear not, for I have redeemed you.

I have called you by name. You are mine. Then new promises like the one in Isaiah 53. All we like sheep have gone astray.

we have turned everyone to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

What advantage has the Jew? Much in every way. the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. They knew what no one else knew.

They knew that mankind was lost without hope by themselves. And they also knew that there was a great hope.

[ 21 : 51 ] they knew something that mattered more than anything else. Why are the oracles so good?

The oracles of God are so good because they reveal what the point of Romans is. Remember I tell you every single week at the very beginning Romans is about the gospel.

It is about the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. Why was it so good to be a Jew? Why is it so great to grow up in the church?

Because Paul is not telling you here anything you don't already know. You already have the very words of God.

Paul's saying yes scripture does not save. Having the law doesn't get you off the hook but it does point you to the one who does save.

[ 23 : 04 ] And that is of great value. This chapter in Romans chapter 3 in just a few weeks he'll go on to say this. 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.

I've told you before and I'll tell you again that the book of Romans is often called the fifth gospel because whatever Paul teaches Jesus taught first.

The same thing is true this week. John chapter 5 Jesus is rebuking religious leaders and he says this if you believed Moses and it's one of the authors of the Old Testament you would believe me for he wrote of me.

In other words Jesus is saying look the Old Testament was about me but if you do not believe his writings how will you believe my words. Of course even more famous is Luke chapter 24.

Jesus is on the road after his resurrection he's explaining the Old Testament to some men who are with him and it says this beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

[ 24 : 39 ] Why is it such a blessing and a privilege to have the oracles of God? Because they show us Jesus.

They show us our need for his grace and his mercy and they show us him giving us that very same grace and mercy.

It's good because it gives light in the dark. Some of you if you were here during our series on 1st and 2nd Peter many years ago now heard me tell you many times about Corrie Ten Boom who is a Dutch watchmaker in the Netherlands in World War II and she was famous for hiding Jews who were trying to escape the Nazi regime.

She was eventually caught for her work and she spent most of 1944 in a Nazi concentration camp. One thing she did though when she was in this concentration camp is she was able to sneak in a copy of the Bible and she and a group of women would read it together whenever they had a free moment.

They would read it in the morning and they would read it at night. And she tells the story, this is on the back of your worship guide, from morning until lights out, whenever we were not in ranks for roll call, our Bible was the center of an ever widening circle of help and hope.

[ 26 : 25 ] Like wafts clustered around a blazing fire, we gathered about it holding our hearts to its warmth and light. The blacker the night around us grew, the brighter and truer and more beautiful burned the word of God.

That's the name of the concentration camp they were in. It took place on two separate levels, mutually impossible. On one, the observable external life grew every day more horrible.

The other, the life we lived with God grew daily better, truth upon truth, glory upon glory.

Christian, the blacker the night around us grows, the brighter and truer and more beautiful burns the word of God.

Now, I had to shorten this quote so it would fit, but she tells us what they were reading were the great promises of Romans chapter eight. The promise that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

[ 27 : 46 ] the promise that we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Then what advantage has the Jew or what is the value of circumcision much in every way?

to begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and we thank you for the great privilege of your word. We thank you that it's living, that you brought dead things to life when you speak.

You brought creation out of nothing by your words. We ask that you would remind us of that and do it again this morning, that your word would be at work powerfully in our hearts, in our minds, in our lives, that you would bring new life to us.

We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn.