

What's So Good About the Gospel

David Carter / General Adult

Unshakeable: Romans / Romans 3:21-31

I remember when Ally and I moved from Windsor to the Durham region nine years ago, I remember signing the mortgage papers for our home. Over half a million dollars.

I signed my name... and that night I couldn't sleep.

I kept thinking, *What have I just done?*

That's a lot of zeros.

That's decades of payments.

That's a weight over your head that just doesn't go away.

And then 3 years ago we moved to Brampton.

And the numbers got even higher.

And now, honestly, what I wouldn't give to find something in Brampton for five hundred thousand.

We understand the weight of debt in the GTA.

We understand what it feels like to sign something that will take years — even decades — to pay off.

But here's the difference with a mortgage.

At least, eventually, you can pay it off.

Slowly.

One payment at a time.

But what if you signed a debt, you could never repay?

Not in 25 years.

Not in 50 years.

Not in a hundred lifetimes.

That's where Romans has brought us.

For three chapters Paul has shown us the weight of our moral debt before God.

All have sinned.

All fall short.

Every mouth stopped.

The whole world accountable.

Not just struggling people.

Not just immoral people.

Unrighteous people.

And then in [Romans 3:21](#), two words break in:

“But now...”

That weight of relief, there is a way back, there is a path to take.

But now, we're ready to appreciate, celebrate and worship God rightly for the gospel.

Here's why the gospel is such good news!

The gospel is good news because God has made a righteous way for unrighteous people.

Look with me at [Romans 3](#) this morning, as we journey through verses 21-31.

And we ask the question, what's so good about the gospel?

“But now...”

Those words ring as sweet relief, don't they?

If you've been journeying with us through the first three chapters of Romans, we have felt the weight. We've been waiting for the but.

And yet — we needed those first three chapters.

We needed to feel the weight of sin. We needed to understand the severity of the human condition without Christ. It was necessary to understand the depth of the problem before we could appreciate the greatness of God's solution.

Paul started with the sweetness of the gospel back in chapter 1:16–17. The gospel, he said, is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes — everyone who trusts and relies on Jesus. In the gospel, God provides righteousness.

That sounds wonderful... but why do we need it?

And Paul has been walking us through that.

We need the gospel because we are under the wrath of God. We wrestled with that. How can a loving God also be angry? And we said, if He wasn't angry, He wouldn't be loving. Do you remember that?

If God loves His creation, how could He not be angry at that which destroys and corrupts His creation? How can I say I love my children, but not be angry about the things that threaten or endanger them?

Mankind is under the wrath of God because we have rejected Him — replaced Him with other objects of worship.

So we need the gospel.

Chapter 2 shows us that we are not only under wrath but headed toward judgment. Every one of us will one day stand before God and give an account. And on that day, we will not be able to stand in our own righteousness — because we have none.

Then chapter 3 brings it all to a close. Paul makes his closing arguments and shows us that it is impossible to earn righteousness, because sin — like a vicious disease — has infected every part of human life and experience. When the

verdict is laid down, every mouth is stopped and the whole world is held accountable to God.

We felt that weight.

And we're ready for the "but."

But now...

Everything that Paul has been saying is leading to this point, and everything that he will say moving forward will build on these verses.

But now...

What's so good about the gospel is this.

GOD PROVIDES RIGHTEOUSNESS

God provides the righteousness that we could never earn.

That's what Paul is saying to us in verses 21 and 22, you see it?

Romans 3:21-22 ESV

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe...

Righteousness. That's been the problem all along, hasn't it. You and I were created in the image of God. Meaning we were created to reflect the righteousness, the moral character of God.

But we fall short... It's what Paul says in verse 23; ***all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.***

God's righteousness is the standard, and we all fall short. We fall short because of everything Paul has said in the previous chapters.

Now some may indeed be more moral than others, that's not an argument, but it's kind of like taking a test, when the passing grade is a 51%, none of us get the passing grade.

You might score a 10, you might score a 20, you might even score a 45, we still fall short of the mark.

Maybe a better image is like trying to jump across the ocean, or the Grand Canyon... you might jump farther, you might jump shorter, but you still can't make it to the other side.

Right? This is the issue, the mark is the moral character of God... we fall short, drastically short.

But now Paul says God has provided a way. He has provided a way of righteousness. The righteousness of God has been manifested. God has stepped in.

And He has to, doesn't He? Because we can't fix the issue ourselves. We can't repair it, even though we've tried.

The moral compass of humanity is broken, no matter how much education, how much social change, no matter how much technological advancement there is.

God has to step in.

Notice he says but now the righteousness of God has been manifested, manifested meaning God has revealed and made it known.

Now that does not mean this is something brand new or disconnected from the Old Testament. Paul immediately says, "*although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it.*"

In other words, this has always been God's plan.

The entire Old Testament has been pointing forward to this righteous way.

This is not Plan B.

This is fulfillment.

But “apart from the law” means righteousness is not achieved by law-keeping.

That’s been the issue all along. The Jews thought they could earn righteousness by obeying God’s Law, the law that Moses gave them.

You may not even know what the Law of Moses is, but we all have this inner moral code we try and follow.

It’s a list of rules and regulations. But righteousness is more than just behaviour modification. The righteousness that God requires is not just about our actions, or following rules, it’s about the state of our hearts.

And so, it’s not enough to refrain from stealing, but do you desire something that doesn’t belong to you, are you jealous of someone because they have what you don’t have?

It’s not enough to keep yourself from killing, but is there hatred in your heart, anger towards someone that you’re holding onto?

Do you see? We all fall short.

But now — now there is a way of righteousness apart from the Law. And that righteousness, Paul says, comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

Why Jesus?

Because Jesus does what we could not do. He lives out perfect righteousness.

He lived in perfect obedience to the Father. He said, “I did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it.” And fulfill it He did.

He lived the righteous life that God requires.

And not only did He live out righteousness on our behalf — He paid for our unrighteousness. He secured for us what we could never secure for ourselves.

God has made a way to righteousness through His Son Jesus.

Read it again in verse 22, ***the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe...***

By faith.

Now understand, faith is not some mystical power or spiritual force. Faith simply means actively trusting, relying, depending.

Righteousness is granted to those who trust that what Jesus accomplished on their behalf is enough.

By faith — by trusting and relying on what Jesus did — His righteousness covers our unrighteousness.

Which means when God looks at you, if you are in Christ, He does not see your failure first. He sees His Son.

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”

That’s exchange.

That’s substitution.

That’s grace.

That’s the gospel.

That’s why the gospel is good news.

Because God has provided the righteousness we could never earn.

It comes by faith in His Son.

Maybe you’re wondering — why faith?

Why does it come that way?

Why not effort?

Why not religion?

Why not moral improvement?

Because faith makes sense.

Faith is not a work.

Faith is the opposite of a work.

Faith doesn't achieve — it receives.

Faith doesn't earn — it depends.

Faith has nothing to contribute — it simply trusts.

It's like a drowning person doesn't save themselves — they cling to the one who can. Faith is clinging.

Faith levels the ground.

If salvation could be earned, it would belong to the strongest, the wisest, the most disciplined. There would be a front row for the morally impressive.

But faith levels the ground.

At the foot of the cross, there aren't VIP sections. There are only sinners who trust.

That's what's so good about the gospel — it's available to everyone.

“For all who believe.” Paul says there is no distinction.

Just as God shows no partiality in judgment, He shows no partiality in salvation.

All who believe can be found righteous in Christ. No matter who you are. No matter where you come from. Not your race, not your family, not your income, not your past.

If it is by faith, then righteousness in Christ is available to you today.

God has made a righteous way for unrighteous people.

He has provided in His Son the righteousness we could never earn.

But how?

Because here's the thing, righteousness doesn't come cheap, someone had to pay the price.

That's where Paul goes next...

GOD PAYS THE PRICE

That's what's so good about the gospel. God pays the price we could never afford.

Through Jesus, God pays the price that we could never pay.

That's the second thing we see here.

Look at verses 24-26 with me. It says that all are...

Romans 3:24-25 ESV

and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

There's a key word in that first section you and I need to take note of...

That we are justified by His grace as a gift... that key word gift is so important.

Grace and gift go together.

They tell us how we receive salvation, grace means it's something we don't deserve; grace is greater than we deserve.

The word gift tells us that it's something we don't pay for, we cannot earn.

And I think that's easy to understand, but difficult for us to embrace. Because it's so counter to how life works isn't it? Nothing is free, everything comes at a cost.

And even when someone gives us a gift, we feel like now we're indebted to them. Like if someone gives you a Christmas gift that you didn't expect, what's the common thing so often said? Oh, but I didn't get you anything.

But that's not how a gift works is it?

Like imagine for a moment that you had someone you loved so much that all you wanted to do was give them a gift, and so you did, you went out and bought them the most precious thing you could afford.

You give them that gift, but they say, but I didn't do anything to earn this, well that's okay, I just wanted to gift you with something.

But there's nothing I can do to pay you back, well.. I don't expect you to pay me back, I mean, that's what makes it a gift.

Imagine they came back every day, saying I need to do something. At some point you would get a little frustrated. You would say, just enjoy the gift.

Salvation – righteousness – is a free gift given to those who believe. Not something to be earned or repaid.

It's a free gift that you can receive by faith today.

Often as Christians we don't struggle with salvation being free to receive, but I think we often struggle feeling as though we have to earn God's love and His affection.

If we couldn't pay to gain salvation, how can we pay to maintain it?

The struggle for most Christians is resting in God's grace and His gift.

But here's what we know. We know that just because a gift didn't cost us anything, doesn't mean that gift doesn't come at a cost.

Someone paid for the gift; it just wasn't you or me.

What's so good about the gospel is that in His Son Jesus, God pays the price that we could never pay.

And Paul comes at this from different angles.

Like the bible often talks about our sin as debt, a debt that keeps us in bondage. Remember that phrase back in verse 9, that said that all mankind is under sin?

Apart from Jesus we are in bondage to sin, and we feel it, we know it.

This compulsion that even though we know the right thing to do and we want to do that right thing; we end up doing the very thing we don't want to do.

We know the guilt, the shame, the hurt that comes from regret.

The gospel sets you free, free from the bondage of sin, the debt of sin, the shame of sin, the pain of sin, the consequences of sin. The brokenness that results from sin.

But someone paid for that freedom...

That's why Paul says that we are justified by His grace as a gift, look at verse 24 ***through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.***

Redemption... it's a word that speaks of the purchase price paid to purchase someone's freedom. Like a ransom.

That's what Jesus did at the cross, your freedom, your liberty in Christ, your freedom from sin, and shame and brokenness, it comes to you as a gift, that Jesus paid for it with His life.

It was a debt paid in blood, the blood of Jesus Christ.

He took on your sin debt, and my sin debt and He paid the price.

The wages of sin, the cost of sin is death.

Jesus paid it.

But not just our sin debt.

Remember what Paul told us back in chapter 1? That mankind, because we have rejected God, is under the wrath of God.

Jesus didn't just pay for our freedom, His death on the cross satisfies the wrath of God.

That's what's tied up in that word propitiation. In verse 25, you see it?

We received justification as a gift through Jesus, who God put forward as a propitiation.

Modern translations would take that word and translate atonement, because propitiation is a very old word, and because well no one likes to talk about God's wrath and anger.

But this is where words matter. Atonement is a covering of sin by way of sacrifice, and no doubt that is what Christ has done, but if, as Paul says, we are under God's wrath, then if Jesus did not remove that wrath, we are still under it.

Propitiation is a word used to describe the wrath of God being satisfied, and that's what Jesus did on the cross isn't it?

That's why the gospel is so good because as Jesus went to the cross, He paid the price for our freedom from the burden, penalty and slavery to sin. He took on the wrath of God that we deserve. He faced it in full force on our behalf.

Think about that, it helps us understand that price paid by Jesus, God poured out His wrath on Christ.

We pause and think, this is God's Son. Why would anyone do that to their son? And I think we need to pause for a moment and wrestle with that question.

Some have this picture in mind of God as an angry God that wants to destroy mankind, and Jesus is this kind loving Saviour who says, no, please don't do this. And God kind of says, well then you pay for their sin.

But that's not a clear understanding of what's going on here, understand that God and Jesus are one, they are perfectly unified in purpose, mission, plan.

Salvation isn't just what Jesus wants, it's what God wants. God's wrath does need to be satisfied, but notice, verse 25 says **God put forward Jesus.**

God's love provides the way. This is God's plan that Jesus is carrying out. God so loved the world that He gave us His Son.

But don't picture Jesus as a helpless victim in this scenario, no... Jesus willingly went to the cross, remember He said in John 10?

John 10:17-18 ESV

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

For the joy set before Him, Jesus willingly endured the cross. He wasn't forced, He willingly laid His life down. He willingly paid the price. He willingly faced the wrath for you and me.

And He didn't have to convince the Father to go through with it, no, this was their plan from eternity past. To redeem fallen humanity back.

The good news is that in Jesus, God pays the price that we could never afford.

Jesus satisfied our sin debt.

He satisfied God's wrath.

But here's what else He did — He satisfied justice.

We keep seeing that word in these verses — justified.

Verse 24 says we are justified by His grace. And the real tension that God faces — if we can even say it that way — comes to the surface in verses 25 and 26.

Romans 3:25-26 ESV

...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 he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Here's the issue.

God cannot simply forgive sin because we ask Him to. That's not how justice works.

Let's go back to that speeding ticket illustration.

I'm speeding, I get pulled over, I get a ticket. I can pay the fine, or I can try to fight it in court.

Let's say I go to court. The evidence is clear. I'm guilty. The judge really has two options. Either the fine is enforced — that's justice. Or I'm let go — that's mercy.

But the judge cannot simply ignore the law. They can't say, "You're guilty, but never mind." That wouldn't be just.

And that's the issue Paul is pressing on.

He says that in God's divine forbearance He had passed over former sins. Think about that. Before Jesus came, people sinned — real sins. Moses committed murder. Abraham lied and deceived. David committed adultery and then had a man killed to cover it up.

Did God just shrug and say, "It's fine"? Did He simply overlook it?

What about you? What about me? The things we've said. The harm we've caused. The selfishness. The pride. Is it just for God to simply pass over that?

No. That would be unjust.

It would be no different than a judge letting a guilty person walk out of the courtroom without consequence.

Unless — someone else steps in.

Unless a third party says, "I'll pay it."

If I'm guilty, the fine stands, justice must be satisfied — but someone else pays it — now both justice and mercy meet.

The law is upheld. The penalty is paid. And I walk free.

That's what happens at the cross.

God could not simply pass over sin, because then He would not be just. So He ensured that justice was carried out — not on us — but on His Son.

Jesus didn't just satisfy debt.

He didn't just satisfy wrath.

He satisfied justice.

That's why Paul says all of this was to show God's righteousness at the present time — so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

God is just. He does not ignore sin. He does not lower the standard. Justice is paid in full.

And at the same time, He is the justifier. He declares righteous the one who has faith in Christ.

That's what justified means. It's a legal term. It means a verdict has been rendered.

Not that you were innocent.

Not that you never sinned.

You did. I did. We know it.

It means the penalty has been satisfied.

When your record is opened in the courtroom of heaven, it does not read "condemned." It reads "paid in full."

Instead of you facing judgment, Jesus faced it.

Instead of you bearing justice, He bore it.

And because He did, God can declare you righteous without compromising His righteousness.

That is what makes the gospel so good.

God has made a righteous way for unrighteous people.

He provides the righteousness we could never earn.

He pays the price we could never afford.

And in the end, here's what's so good about the gospel —

God gets the glory we could never claim.

GOD GETS THE GLORY

God gets the glory because there is nothing left for you and me to boast about.

Romans 3:27–28 ESV

Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Paul asks, “What becomes of our boasting?” It is excluded.

There is no law we could follow. Nothing we could cling to. Nothing we could point to and say, “This is why God saved me.”

As one preacher once said, the only thing we contribute to our salvation is the sin that made it necessary.

Imagine if there were something we could do to earn it. If we could gain righteousness on our own — why would Jesus need to die?

No cross would be necessary.

And in the end, we could say, “I did it. I earned it.”

We could boast before God.
We could boast over others.

But there is no boasting.

Because there is no distinction.

We are all equally guilty. And salvation is equally available to all.

To God alone be the glory for the great things He has done through His Son Jesus.

And here's something else — God gets the glory because He is shown to be the God of all people.

Romans 3:29–30 ESV

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

Not just the Jews. Not just the Gentiles. But the one true God of all.

That was always the plan — that through Abraham all the nations would be blessed.

And through Jesus, the curtain is torn in two.

Salvation is available to Jew and Gentile — to every man, woman, and child.

God is exalted as the God of the nations — every tribe, every tongue, every language.

And one day all of His redeemed people will stand around His throne and worship Him together.

He is glorified as the God of all.

And finally, He is glorified because His Law is upheld.

Romans 3:31 ESV

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

The gospel does not overthrow the Law.

The issue was never God's Law. His Law is holy and just and good.

The problem was us.

We tried to use the Law as a ladder to climb to God — but it was never meant to be that.

It was meant to show us what righteousness looks like.

And in Jesus, the Law is fulfilled.

Justice is upheld.

The gospel does not do away with God's holiness — it magnifies it.

This is what's so good about the gospel.

God has made a righteous way for unrighteous people.

You don't have the righteousness God requires. I don't either.

But in His Son, God provides it.

You could never pay the debt. Neither could I.

But in His Son, God paid it.

You could never stand before a holy God on your own record.

But in Jesus, your record can read "paid in full."

That's the good news.

And maybe you've been sitting here this morning feeling the weight of the last few weeks. The weight of sin. The weight of judgment. The weight of your own failure.

Listen — the gospel is not an invitation to try harder.

It's not an invitation to clean yourself up.

It's not an invitation to earn your way back.

It's an invitation to trust.

To stop striving.

To stop defending yourself.

To stop pretending you've got it.

And to say, "Jesus, I trust what You did for me is enough."

Faith is not achieving — it's receiving.

Maybe today, for the first time, you need to put your faith in Christ. Not faith in yourself. Not faith in your morality. Not faith in your church attendance. Faith in Jesus.

He lived the righteous life you failed to live.

He bore the justice you deserved.

And He stands ready to justify all who believe.

All who believe.

There is no distinction.

So if you have never trusted Him — trust Him today.

And if you have trusted Him — rest in Him.

Stop carrying what He already paid for.

Stop trying to earn what was already given.

Let the gospel humble you. Let it steady you. Let it lift your eyes.

Because in the end —

He gets the glory.

And that is very good news.