

The Reason We Need Jesus Romans 3:9-20

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Today is Palm Sunday, a day when palm branches or parts of palm branches are handed out in many churches to commemorate Jesus' coming into Jerusalem at the beginning of the last week before He was executed on the cross.

Palm Sunday is significant because as Jesus rode into Jerusalem He was making some powerful claims (by His actions). He was fulfilling prophecy and He was claiming to be the Messiah or Savior the Jewish people had been waiting for since the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15).

Over the 43 years I have observed Palm Sunday with you, I am sure I have covered Palm Sunday from every single direction you could look at it . . .twice or more. The low point was the year I looked at Palm Sunday from the Donkey's perspective!

This year I ask the question: Why was Palm Sunday necessary? Why was Christ's coming into the world essential? Why was it imperative that Jesus die on the cross for us? To answer this question, we turn once again to Romans 3, verses 9-20, where we will see the reason Jesus had to come. Next Sunday, Rick will show us how Jesus's death and resurrection changed everything!

⁹ Well then, should we conclude that we Jews are better than others? No, not at all, for we have already shown that all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are under the power of sin.

¹⁰ As the Scriptures say,

“No one is righteous—
not even one.

¹¹ No one is truly wise;
no one is seeking God.

¹² All have turned away;
all have become useless.

No one does good,
not a single one.”

We Are All Guilty of Sin

These verses serve as the conclusion to Paul's opening section of the book of Romans. The conclusion is that NO ONE is righteous. To be righteous is to live the right way in God's eyes. Paul points out that our problem as human beings is that we sin (making us unrighteous) and are also under its power. We are *addicted* to sin. Paul wants us to see that sin is not just something that scratches the surface of our lives, it holds us in bondage. Paul drives this home (especially to His Jewish audience) by quoting the Old Testament (Psalm 14:1-3, 53:1-3, Psalm

5:9, 140:3, 10:7, Isaiah 59:7-8 and Psalm 36:11 . This is meant to show that this conclusion is not a construct of his imagination, it is a theme throughout the Bible.

Notice that Paul uses what are called “universal negatives.” A universal negative is a negative statement made so that there can be no exception. EVERYONE, whether you are a professing atheist, upstanding citizen, or a religious leader, has the same problem. We are sinful people who deserve condemnation. Listen as Paul lays this out in several statements from Scripture.

No one is righteous. We all know that we have sinned. We have not lived perfect lives. We readily admit this. However, somehow, we look at others and feel we are more righteous than they are, so God should, I guess, be grateful. The Bible says we will always look good when we measure ourselves by others. (Partially because we are much harder on others than we are on ourselves). When we measure ourselves by God’s standards, we do not fare so well.

It has been said that if you drew a continuum with God on one end and the most vicious and godless people you can think of on the other, and you were asked to place yourself on this continuum, in an effort to be humble we might place ourselves somewhere in the middle leaning God’s way. However, if God were placing us on the continuum there would be just a slight separation (perhaps) between us and those on the very bottom of the continuum. This is because we don’t see how often we sin and turn away from the Lord.

No One is Truly Wise. There are many who would be greatly offended by these words of the apostle Paul. They believe they are very wise. (Some of these people are professing Christians who feel they have the wisdom (they call it “discernment”) to be able to point out all the things everyone else is doing wrong).

Many in the world scoff at Christians because they believe we are naïve and empty-headed, because we believe in the supernatural and in eternal life. For some reason they think they are wise because they are convinced that we descended from monkeys and life holds no eternal meaning. Of course, the Bible calls such people “fools.”

No One Seeks God but all have turned away. This takes us back to Paul’s comments in the first chapter. God can be known from His creation but men are unwilling to acknowledge or give thanks to Him. You may believe that you were seeking God at some point in your life but Jesus said, in John chapter 6:44 Jesus said,

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me, and in the last days I will raise them up.

In other words, we must depend on God to draw us to Him because if it was left up to us, we would never seek Him. (We will talk much more about this later in Romans). That feeling that you had that you were seeking God was actually God drawing you to Him. We like to think that the key to our salvation is that we are smarter than other people and we sought God and found Him, but the Bible teaches us that left to our own devices, we would NEVER choose Him. We are entirely dependent on the Lord for salvation. If God did not first awaken us, we could not, and would not, choose Him.

We may still be a little dubious about the idea of no one seeking God. This is because we see people who are seeking the things that only can be found in Christ (a sense of forgiveness, a feeling of wholeness, peace, joy, and a place to belong) and we conclude that these folks are seeking God. But the reality is that mankind, apart from Christ, wants the things that only God can give us, but they don't want Him! They want peace but not the Prince of Peace, they want purpose in their life but not if this purpose is different from what they want. We still want to be the gods of our own life even though we cannot obtain what only God can give us.

They have all become useless. As I was writing this message I was about halfway through my draft (better than an hour of time invested writing) and I went to close one of the documents I had open and ended up closing all the documents without them being saved! All that hard work was gone. That is the fate of those who do not repent and turn to the Lord. All the deeds of their lives will be worthless. They will not help them at all.

No One Does What is Good. We really resist this one. We know lots of people who do good.

- The mom who gives birth and cares for her child
- The dad who works two jobs to provide for his family or who is willing to stay home with his children while his wife works.
- The good Samaritan that helps out a stranger in need.
- The soldier who sacrifices his life to save his fellow soldiers.
- The one who foregoes many modern conveniences so they can give more to others.
- The child who sits at the bedside of a parent in the hospital or nursing home.

Again, let me turn to Sproul, he writes

“from a biblical standpoint, there are two aspects to a good deed. When God weighs our actions, He weighs whether they correspond outwardly to His law. God requires honesty, and we are honest if we do not cheat on our income taxes or steal. It is good that we do not steal; it is good that we do not cheat—so far, so good. We have that external conformity to the law of God. However, when God evaluates our behavior not only does He judge the outward action, but He also considers the inward motivation. Therefore, for people to do good in God's sight, they not only have to do something that externally conforms to His law but they also must be motivated in that action by a heart that is trying to please God, a heart that loves Him completely, with the whole mind.” [ROMANS]

The point is that our deeds are only good if they are a good action done out of a desire to please God. I do believe Christians can do good things. However, that is not who Paul is talking about here. He is talking about our state before Christ. He is, if you will, telling us the reason we really need Jesus.

Our Need is Clearly Seen by Experience

Paul goes on in his list of Old Testament passages to give a few brief examples of how this sin nature manifests itself in daily life.

¹³ “Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave.

Their tongues are filled with lies.”

“Snake venom drips from their lips.”

¹⁴ “Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”

¹⁵ “They rush to commit murder.

¹⁶ Destruction and misery always follow them.

¹⁷ They don’t know where to find peace.”

¹⁸ “They have no fear of God at all.”

Their talk is foul. Do you remember in the earlier days of television when profanity was completely forbidden on shows? Do you remember whenever you would see a married couple in the bedroom they were sleeping in separate beds? How things have changed! Now shows are often laced with profanity and vulgar speech. Immorality is depicted without embarrassment or apology. It illustrates Paul’s point even in our day.

Another example Paul gives is that their **tongues were filled with lies**. As we enter the heart of the political season, I don’t know that I need to say much more about how true this is. Also the prevalence of scams illustrates the point. People will say anything to gain something for themselves. This is the prevalence of the sinful nature.

“They speak poisonous words.” Think about gossip or the character-destroying words often found on social media. Think about bullying, resentment, bitterness, and jealousy you hear all around you. Resentment is replaying a hurt repeatedly until it turns into bitterness and takes over your life. All a sin of the sin of mankind.

Paul says **“They rush to commit murder.”** Another way to say this is that they no longer respect life. Someone did a calculation of the violence in warfare over the last two thousand years. The most peaceful century was the first century and the second was the nineteenth century and everyone believed we were evolving into better people. They believed our advancements in science and education meant we were now more civilized and warfare was over. This is when evolution became possible. But there was more violence and warfare in the first quarter of the 20th century than in any full century before. And that was before World War II the slaughter of millions in Red China, Vietnam, Korea and the wars that burst out all over the world.

Now you look at the violence and disregard for life that is breaking out in cities all over our country and in other parts of the world and you see what Paul was referring to. Add the legalized killing of babies and the killing of the elderly and it is clear that there is nothing civilized or advanced about this society.

It is Essential to Understand These Things Before we Can Truly Understand Grace

¹⁹ Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. ²⁰ For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.

The Law, according to Paul was never meant to save anyone. The Law was designed to lead people to the One who could save them. This is where many people get confused. They believe that people in Old Testament times were saved by their good behavior, and people who lived after Christ were saved by grace.

If this were true, no one in the Old Testament could have been saved! Why? Because there are none that are righteous . . . not even one! People in the Old Testament were saved the same way we are. They were saved by grace that is expressed through faith. These people had faith in the One who would come according to God's promise.

The Law, says Paul, makes clear what God wants from His people. It is like a constitution written by God for His creation. In some ways, the Law of God is like an owner's manual. It tells us how to use and respect the life He has given. As we measure ourselves against the Law, we see that we have drifted far off course. We know we need to repent and return to Him.

The problem is that no one will be looking for the gift of God which is found in Christ if they feel they are good enough to be saved. We must face the reality of our own sinfulness before we will ever cry out to God for salvation by His grace. We need the Law of God to help us see our need.

This is the problem you face sometimes when you start talking about Jesus to your friends or family. They may be polite and feign listening but they don't honestly believe they need this Jesus. They believe they are doing OK on their own. This is why we must speak about sin. You and I need to understand that we are lost apart from Christ. We are condemned by our sinful behavior. The Law shows this to us.

Our sin is really our rebellion or rejection of God. This is what we are seeing in much of the moral confusion today. Without some kind of objective standard everyone does what is right in their own eyes. And, this leads to a disregard for others, curses, bloodshed, and conflict. People who believe in the absolute freedom of man to determine his own moral code call themselves progressives but the evidence says they could better be called re-gressives for we are becoming more and more animalistic in our behavior.

Applying These Truths

If you have been with us through these first three chapters of Romans I hope you have come to the conclusion that you are a sinful person who deserves the wrath of God. When we talk about sinful people we are not talking about "them" but US.

So what are we to make of all of this? **First, if we recognize our condition we should come to Christ as soon as possible.** Do you see your sin? Are you convinced that YOU need a Savior? Have these words of Paul stripped away your defenses and shown you how much you need Him? Are you putting off turning to and trusting Christ as your Savior and as the Lord (or King) of your life? Why? There is no hope outside of Him. We should be seeking the Lord as a matter of life and death . . . literally.

Second, we should not dismiss the Old Testament Law because it is a light that can be used to measure and search our own soul. Parts of the Old Testament are not easy to read. However, the Old Testament gives us the Law of God which helps us to know God better. It also gives us the context we need to better understand the New Testament.

We will always tell people to start by getting to know Jesus in the gospels. It is essential to pay close attention to what the New Testament is teaching us. It is our message of salvation. However, that doesn't mean we should ignore the other 2/3 of the Bible known as the Old Testament.

Finally, We should be more discerning in the way we live our lives. Listen to these words from one commentator,

Let us question ourselves: Do we follow cultural norms that have no biblical basis? Do we receive popular opinions without a second thought? Do we convince ourselves that whatever is in our self-interest is right? Or do we compare our words and deeds to God's standards and repent whenever we fall short? All will stand before the Judge and answer for every word, deed, and thought. Then our excuses will not hold up. Even a modicum of self-examination reveals that we do the very things we condemn in others. {Doriani, Daniel M.. Romans (Reformed Expository Commentary) (p. 147).}

We spend a good deal of our lives filling our minds with garbage and being persuaded more by the pundits on our favorite news shows than by the Word of God. We are often guilty of simply parroting the teachers we hear on television rather than examining the Word of God for ourselves.

We have to wake up and take seriously our situation! We must diligently and carefully pursue truth. And this is not the truth someone tells us on YouTube or some blog you might listen to. We must seek the truth of God! Online sermons, podcasts, chat rooms, YouTube and other videos should never have more influence on us than God's Word. Getting our information from social media of any kind will tend to make us angry. We will look for offenses rather than look to build bridges. Studying God's Word will lead us to softness and humility. In fact, if you find that you are becoming more irritable, turn off the media and sit with the Lord!

The story of Palm Sunday tells us about Jesus' entry into Jerusalem the week before He was crucified. Next week, Rick will show us why Jesus had to die and why it is actually good news rather than bad news.

For now, it is enough to realize that the reason Jesus came into Jerusalem, the reason He came to earth, the reason He went to the cross, was because this was what was necessary to rescue us from our sin and alienation from God. This reality should lead us to praise, honor and serve Him every day of our lives. So go ahead and wave your Palm branches, sing songs to the Savior, celebrate His with gusto because, when you realize why He came, you know we cannot serve or praise enough.