The Problem of Righteousness — Delivery Transcript

Genesis 3:6–7; Romans 3:21–26 (ESV) · Wes Terry · Sunday, March 12, 2023 · *The Fall*

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All right, well thanks to the band for leading us in worship and certainly think that last song is a fitting way to set the table for what we're going to be looking at this morning. So if you have your Bibles you can open them to the book of Romans. And I know that if you've been with us for a while, that may sound like a shock to you since we've been in Genesis for the last good little bit, but we're taking a little hiatus in Genesis for one week as we really kind of fill out some of what we looked at last week in Genesis chapter 3, verses 6 and 7, with a message that I'm going to title "The Problem of Righteousness."

Our church, if you're new to our church, the reason our church exists is to be a disciple-making church. We believe that Jesus is God. We believe that He has commissioned us to join Him in making a name for Himself amongst the nations. He's building this church and we are part of that church he's building. And we believe that the best thing that he has given us as a church to accomplish the mission of making disciples is—to put it shortly—the message of the gospel. We want to be a church that's a gospel preaching church.

We want to be a church filled with gospel-shaped people, people who believe the gospel and are shaped by the gospel. We want to be people who are conversant with the gospel and one of the reasons I want us to look at Romans chapter three this morning is because I think it's going to be like a key that unlocks the door to understanding the gospel in Genesis, specifically Genesis 1, 2, and 3. Charles Spurgeon, one of the great Baptist preachers back in the day, talked about the scarlet thread that is woven throughout all the Old Testament, and that scarlet thread is the message of the gospel in the person of Jesus Christ.

And it's easy to read Genesis 1, 2, and 3 and think it has nothing to do with the gospel because a lot of us grow up in churches thinking the gospel is God is holy and I'm sinful and Christ died on the cross for my sins and I need to receive him. And Genesis is about creation and stuff like that, so there's no real parallel. But that would be an incorrect assumption. The gospel is actually on every page of the scripture because it is the central message of God to us and it is revealed progressively from Genesis all the way to Revelation.

So I want to help us to get that and hopefully as a church help us become better equipped at knowing the gospel, sharing the gospel, seeing the gospel in Scripture, and because we see the gospel deeply in Scripture, we can see the gospel in the world around us as well. In fact I want you to be so conversant with the gospel you could watch a Marvel movie and see the gospel. Probably not the whole thing, but you could see like, okay, there's this, there's this, there's the message, and this message from God to us is actually being told all over the place throughout all the world and all the arts and entertainment because we all have a longing for God.

We're all looking for righteousness and atonement. We're all looking for some kind of salvation, and that salvation is found in Jesus Christ. And you will see people in their search for that salvation paint a beautiful picture of Christ and not even know that's who they're talking about. As the people in the book of Acts, they were worshiping the God—the unknown God. They were worshiping a statue of the unknown God, and Paul says, "Let me explain to you this God that you think you worship. It's actually the Lord Jesus Christ." And I want us to be that familiar with the gospel so that we can have that kind of impact on the world in which we live.

One of the tools that I use when sharing the gospel is what's called the five-second gospel. Have any of you ever heard this? The five-second gospel, I use it with kids because it's so simple. It's four sentences. The first sentence is that God loves us. The second sentence is that we blew it. The third sentence is that Christ paid for it. And the fourth sentence is that we must receive him. Now that's easy enough that anybody could remember it. Let's all say it together. The first sentence is God— There you go.

You remember the first sentence? Sentence number two, we blew it. There you go. And sentence number three, Christ— A little bit weaker on that one. Christ paid for it. That's the most important one. And then finally, we must receive him. And if you think about Genesis 1, 2, and 3, you kind of see those pillars in Genesis chapter 1 and 2. You certainly see God's glory. You see God is holy. You see that God created what he created because of his great love for us and he's kind of made us in his image to love him back and to love one another with that kind of divine love that he shares in the Trinity.

And then when you get to Genesis chapter 3, you see the second pillar in that we blew it. And you say, well, it wasn't we, it was Adam and Eve. But the reality is Adam and Eve are

representatives of every single human being who've ever lived. Their sinning against God kind of corrupted the system and so we're born into the world with a sin nature and so whether it was them or those after them or us today, we blew it. You see that in Genesis 3. And you even see in Genesis chapter 3, verse 15, that third pillar of Christ.

And it doesn't call him by name, but it does say from the seed of the woman will come someone who will crush the head of the serpent. And that seed of the woman is Jesus Christ. He is the one who was anticipated in Genesis 3:15, foretold throughout all the Old Testament, and is born into the world by the Virgin Mary and lives the life that he lives, dies on the cross, God raises him from the dead, and he rescues us or redeems us from the curse of sin. And so Christ pays for it and we must receive Him.

Now I want us to go to Romans 3 instead of Genesis 3, because I think Romans 3 is somewhat of a commentary on Genesis 1, 2, and 3, and is really going to help open up the gospel that we've been exploring over the last several months and weeks. And so let's read chapter 3, verse 21. Paul starts out, this is really the tail end of an argument Paul has been building from Romans 1. And he kind of concludes in verse 21 that the righteousness of God has been now manifested apart from the law.

In other words, it's not in the law, it's something outside of the law, "although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it." Now, when you see the phrase law and prophets, just think Old Testament, okay? Old Testament law, that's Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, the first five books, and then the prophets after that is the rest of the Old Testament. So there's a righteousness of God. It's not in the law, it's apart from the law, but the law and the prophets bear witness to it. What is that righteousness, Paul?

Verse 22, he says, "the righteousness of God" is "through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified"—and I would say all are justified or can be 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." And all of 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." Now we titled last week's message the problem of the curve. I'm titling this week's message the problem of righteousness because the problem that Paul is wrestling with is the problem that got established in Genesis 3, and it's the problem that every single one of us have been living with the entirety of our lives, and it's the problem of righteousness. This idea that God is righteous and we are not is established right here in this text and it's established intuitively in our hearts from a very very early age.

And I'm calling it the problem of righteousness because this phrase righteousness, I don't know if you noticed this, it shows up over and over and over again in our text. It's the Greek word *dikaios*, and sometimes it shows up like righteousness, which is *dikaiosynē*, and then sometimes it's just *dikaios*, which means just, but whether it's just or righteous, it's the same basic concept of God being perfect, God being holy, God being right. And when you are righteous, that means you are right. You're in right fellowship with God. You are in right relationship with the world around you.

Your life is right. It's going well. And that idea of righteousness shows up seven different times in the text. Now I got a list here on the next slide if you want to throw it up there. It shows up in verse 21. Again in verse 22. It shows up as the word justified, but it's the same Greek word, *dikai-*, in verse 24. We are made righteous by God's grace as a gift. Verse 25, to show God's righteousness in the past; verse 26, in the future—in the present time it's showing the righteousness.

And then finally in verse 26,[1] all of this is so that God might be just, aka righteous, and the justifier, aka one who makes righteous those who believe or those who have faith in Jesus. And so this is Paul solving the problem of righteousness and the simple definition of the problem would just be that God is righteous and we are not. God is holy and we're not. And you don't really have to be a Christian to believe this. There are all kinds of people all over the world who are trying to find their way towards God through all these different religions.

You can even see secular, naturalistic, atheist type people implicitly acknowledge this dynamic. We all know that there's a moral law. If you don't believe that there's a moral law and that that law is an objective standard, you just try to steal from someone and see what they do. They wouldn't say, "Well, if that's true for you, go ahead." No, they would say, "That's wrong. You shouldn't treat me like that. That's my stuff; you can't steal from me." Where did that come from? Where's that ought coming from? We think we ought to be treated a certain way.

We think we ought to live a certain way. We think the world ought to look a certain way. We recognize there's a moral standard out there, and the presence of a moral standard implies the presence of a moral lawgiver. But Paul goes beyond that. It's not just that we recognize that there's a moral lawgiver and that there's a moral law. He says if you really are honest, you'll also see that you don't measure up to that standard. In other words, you are guilty and accountable to this moral lawgiver. So it's not just that I ought to be treated a certain way, I'm not treated the way I ought to be treated.

It's not just that I ought to live a certain way, it's that as hard as I try, I can't live the way I ought to live. And so there's a moral lawgiver, there is a moral culpability that we have before that moral lawgiver, and that's the problem of righteousness. And you don't have to be a Christian to have the problem. Every single human who's ever lived throughout any part

of human history has the problem of righteousness. And Paul is saying, Christianity or the gospel is the only good answer to the problem because in Christianity God becomes both the just and the justifier.

Okay, so you have some religions where God's justice is maintained, but he's not the justifier. You can think of things like Islam or even sects—not talking about sex; S-E-C-T-S, however you say that out loud in English—of, like, monotheistic religions where you just try your hardest and you do your darndest and maybe God will be gracious, but you better measure up. That kind of God is just, but there is no justifying of God. And then there are religions and even like in our modern culture where God is just a justifier, he's not all that just, he's just all loving and all kind and is going to accept you no matter what.

So some people are all about truth and some people are all about grace, but Paul is saying, God, if there is a God, he has to be both. He has to be a God of justice. But he also needs to be a God of love because when we think about this moral standard, when we think about this creator, this maximal greatest being, he perfectly embodies both truth and grace. He is just and a justifier. And the world has been searching forever for some way for God to be both. And Paul is saying he is both of those things in this righteousness that's revealed apart from the law, indeed a righteousness that is found through faith in Jesus Christ.

So the question, the problem is how can God be just and the justifier of those who fall short of his glory. And now we're going to answer the question, all right? And we're going to do it by starting in that little phrase in chapter 3, verse 23. It's actually the first stop on the Romans Road. I don't know if you've ever heard about the Romans Road. But it's like six different passages of scripture that you can use to share the gospel. And the first stop on the Romans road is Romans 3:23, which says that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory.

And the reason I love this verse is because of how it defines sin. We talked about this last week, that sin is not just missing the mark, although it is that. It's not just transgression, but it's also this tendency for mankind to be curved in on themselves. That we were made to live for God's glory, but instead of living for God's glory, we kind of turn in on ourselves and live for our own agenda. And that's what Paul's saying in Romans 3. It's not just you, it's not just him, it's everybody who has ever lived post-Genesis 3.

We all fall short of God's glory. The Westminster Shorter Catechism says the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. And I think that's true. I think that's what the Bible teaches from the very beginning to the very end. If you go to the very end of the Bible, what do you see? In Revelation 20 and 21, you see God in his glory create the new heavens, new earth, recreates people, resurrects those believers who have put their faith in Christ, and they live a new life that is without sin, glorifying God and their relationships and their industry and their beautifying of this new world that God creates.

God and his glory and God's people glorifying God and being kind of enjoying his glory. That's how the Bible ends. And we've seen over the last several months, that's how the Bible opens. God creates the heavens and the earth. He is this glorious God. He creates the forms. He fills the forms with fullness and significance. The creation declares the glory of God. He creates mankind in his image. Man is created in his image, which means that mankind has been given a unique capacity to glorify God, to do things that only God can do, like reason and reflect.

You don't see animals reasoning and reflecting. You can see them responding to stimuli and instincts going on, but not an intellect like you see with mankind. Mankind's created in God's image to glorify him in the way that he thinks. He's created in God's image to relate to one another like God relates to himself within the Trinity, that we were given the capacity to give and receive love, to serve and protect and sacrifice, and that when we live in that way, people look at our lives and say, there must be a God.

And this must be what he's like. He's a God that is glorious. He's given us this unique accountability and responsibility over creation to cultivate and beautify the created world, to be like him in creating and recreating. And you don't see that in the animal world like you do in the human race. You never see a horse create a symphony like Mozart—whatever one of his symphonies are. I can't think of a Mozart symphony right now, but that's how the Bible opens. It opens with God's glory in mankind made in God's image, displaying his glory in these ways.

But something happens in Genesis 3. Right? What happens in Genesis 3? Mankind takes of the fruit of the tree that God says, "I don't want you to eat from." So God loves us, but we blew it. And what happens when sin enters into the world, you might think of it like a rock getting thrown into the mirror. If our mirror is God's image, so we were created to mirror God. We were created to represent Him in the way that we think, in the way that we love, in the way that we create.

People were supposed to look at us and say, "Man, God must be great. There must be a God, and He must be good." But now, because of sin, because we fall short of the glory, we use our intellect not to know the truth, but to suppress it. And we use our relationships not to sacrifice and defend and seek the good, but to exploit and use and abuse for ourselves. We use our unique gifts to cultivate and beautify and have dominion over the creation to exploit the creation and use it for ourselves and our glory instead of the glory of God and his kingdom.

The fall took a rock and broke the mirror. God loves us, but we blew it. And as a result, the glory that we were made for, the glory that we will one day regain in Revelation 22, the glory that was originally given in Genesis 1 and 2—that glory is now unattainable. No matter how hard you try, no matter where you look, you can search the religions all over the world, you

can even within Judaism. You see, we're going to see this in the Old Testament. They were trying to be obedient to the law and measure up to this standard.

But no matter how hard they tried, no matter where they looked, it wasn't sufficient. The glory just wasn't there. They always fell short. So we have an unattainable standard of God's glory in this universal depravity of man's inability to get that glory. And if you don't believe that we're wired for God's glory, then where does this ambition come from? Where does this deep longing in us to matter and to be significant and to be known and seen and treasured come from? That comes from God's image in us and yet we know we can go and go and try and try and we never really get it.

That's the backdrop to Paul's words in Romans 3:21: "But now." Anytime you see a "but now" like that, I call them the big butts of the Bible. That's probably not appropriate, but that's how I think about it. That's a big, significant "but now." He's saying the glory that we were all after was unattainable because our sin was universal, but now God's doing something different. And the backdrop of that "but now"—if you go to Romans, I've just talked about Genesis 1, 2, and 3, but if you look at Romans 1, 2, and 3, you're going to see the same thing.

He's going to basically give a commentary on Genesis 3 and Romans 1, 2, and 3. And I'm just going to summarize it for you because we don't have time to go into all of it. But he says in Romans 1 that the righteousness of God— I'm sorry, that the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against the unrighteousness of men "who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth." So Paul's saying the mirror's broken. And as a result of the mirror being broken, mankind is suppressing the truth instead of knowing the truth, and it's inviting the wrath of God on the world.

And we can see that in our world today. We can see God's wrath being revealed. And Paul actually gives a lot of examples we don't have time to go through. But what he does after he establishes this is he picks two groups of people. He says that humankind does this two different ways. They suppress the truth sometimes by being irreligious, and sometimes mankind suppresses the truth by being super religious. You've got the irreligious Gentiles, who are the non-Jewish people, the non-God worshipers, and then you have the religious Jews, and he says both of them are equally unrighteous before God.

So he says of the irreligious Gentiles, they've "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things." He's talking about idolatry. For non-Jewish religions, they were worshiping the creation instead of the Creator. And you say, well that's old fashioned. I would never worship an idol, but sometimes we worship money, sometimes we worship sex, sometimes we worship pleasure, sometimes we're addicted to all kinds of substances and all kinds of other things. It's the same old story. It's idolatry. I've taken knowledge of God which would be truly satisfying,

and I've exchanged it for something lesser, because I know I'm not righteous, because I know I can't be in right relationship with God.

I'm going to choose a lesser thing as a substitute and maybe that'll make me happy. And Paul says it won't, and it doesn't; you're still unrighteous. And then he picks on the religious people, which we like this part better, right? He says unto the religious people in chapter 2, "You guys think just because you're religious and because you know the truth and because you're Jews and you worship the God of the Bible, you think somehow that's going to make you righteous. But it won't." You're looking to the law, which was the first five books of the Old Testament.

You're looking to the Ten Commandments and your obedience to the Ten Commandments to somehow make you think you're better than these unrighteous sinners, and that you're somehow righteous before a holy God. But he says you're deceived. You who boast in the law actually dishonor God by breaking the law. You think you're obedient to the law, you're not. You don't worship the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. You don't honor your parents. You covet, you lie, you cheat, you break the law of God. And as a result God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles.

So you think you're better than the Gentiles when the reality is you're actually dishonoring God's name among the Gentiles. You're way worse off than you think you are. You're not righteous because you're religious. You're just as unrighteous as the irreligious. And that's where he lands in chapter 3. He says, "What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all." We've already charged that all, Jews and Greeks, are under sin, "as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one.'" Are you tracking with me? God is holy, and we blew it.

And we've spent the entirety of our lives either by religious efforts or irreligious pursuits to try to cover our nakedness and to make ourselves whole and every single attempt is deficient. And it's not enough. And God knows it, and that's why He's done something different. He really goes over the top in chapter 3, verse 11 and following. He quotes Isaiah,[2] we've all become like one who's unclean. Our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. I'm not going to go into detail about what that is, but it's very nasty. We all fade like a leaf and our iniquities like the wind take us away.

He says, "No one understands; no one seeks for God." Even these religious churchgoers, they're just in it for themselves. "All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one." "Their throat is an open grave." Think of a dead person rotting and then opening the casket and the stench. That's what our speech is like before this holy God. Their tongues deceive. "The venom of asps is under their lips." "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness." "Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known."

"There is no fear of God before their eyes." A lot of us would read this and say, well, that sounds like America. But even that tendency, even that judgy pointing the finger, Paul is saying, just point it right back at yourself. Because you're just as condemned. You just dressed yourself up a little bit to look a little better. Now, is that to say the law is bad? No. The law is not bad. Israel was given a tremendous gift in being given the Old Testament. They were given the Old Testament, they were given the Ten Commandments as a way of displaying the righteousness of God.

The righteousness of God is revealed in the law. And when they lived according to the law, they were blessed. And it was almost as—was God's way of saying, "I'm holy, I'm the source of wisdom, and when you live the way I've designed you to live, you will be blessed. There will be good things that happen in your life." But God never gave Israel the law so that they would think to themselves, "Well, since God's blessing me, I must be holy before God. Since I'm better than those people, and since I know God's truth, I must be righteous."

They were looking to the law to do for them something it was never designed to do. The law was really meant to reveal the reality of their sin. The law was a mirror. It was a teacher and a tutor that was meant to show them, "You can try and maybe you can get a little bit down the road, but you're not really sufficient. You'll end up breaking the law sooner or later at one point or another." He says in verse 20, "By works of the law no human being will be justified in" God's "sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

So the law reveals God's justice. But it cannot justify. That's what he says to the religious Jews. To the irreligious Gentiles, he would say the creation will not make you righteous before your creator. It doesn't matter how hard you try. And then he says to the religious Jews and to religious people like us today, the Bible is great. Living according to the Bible is wonderful, but no good deeds will ever make you measure up to God's righteous standard. That law was given to expose your need for God's grace. So they were looking to the law to—They saw God's justice, but it couldn't justify.

That's why Paul says in verse 21, now there's something different. "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. For there is no distinction." I love this verse. It's kind of complicated, but here's what he's saying. He's saying God's doing something new now. And this righteousness, this true righteousness that will make you righteous before this righteous God, this righteousness is revealed in these days, but it's a righteousness that's apart from the law.

In other words, Jesus is not the same thing as the law in the Old Testament. He's something different. That being said, the law and the prophets in the Old Testament actually point to Jesus. Here's what he means by that. In the Old Testament, you see the law, right? You see the Ten Commandments, you see God's holiness. You see the sacrificial system, you see the

wages of sin as death, you see God's wisdom, you see God's holiness. But that's not the only thing the Old Testament reveals. If you pay attention closely, you'll also see that the Old Testament is a book about God's grace.

It is a book of law, but it's also a book of gospel. Okay? And what is the gospel? The gospel is we're saved by God's grace through what? Through faith. Well, where do you see grace and faith operate in the Old Testament? Well, how about page one? How about Genesis 3? They take that— By faith they receive those garments and it covers their nakedness. By faith, they probably believe that *protoevangelium* in Genesis 3:15. It's by faith that Abel offered a pleasing sacrifice to the Lord, right after Adam and Eve. It's by faith that Noah— In a wicked, wicked world, God tells him, "You need to build an ark."

And Noah by faith believed God, and as a result of Noah's faith, what happened? He was spared the judgment. The flood comes, it destroys the earth, but Noah is rescued or he is saved by the flood of God's judgment by grace through faith. If you keep reading Genesis chapter 12, we'll get there some year. By faith Abraham believed God, and it was what? Credited to him as righteousness. In other words, the reason that Abraham was chosen as this line through which the Messiah would come was not because Abraham was good or better or somehow impressive.

It's just because he heard God's word and said, "I believe you. I'm going to trust you." And God credited that faith as righteousness. Same thing with Moses. We looked at this with our small group last Thursday. If you go to Hebrews chapter 11, it says that by faith Moses gave up his Egyptian privilege and identified himself with his Hebrew brethren. And as a result of that act of faith, God used Moses to deliver his people from slavery to Pharaoh in Egypt and got them to the promised land. By faith. By faith, the people of Israel, when God was bringing the plagues, they believed God and they sacrificed the lamb, and they took the blood of the lamb and they put it on their doorpost, and as a result of their faith God graciously passed over them.

The death angel passed over them and they escaped God's judgment. You hear what I'm saying? The book of the Old Testament is not just a book of law. The Old Testament is a book of grace. It's a book of law and it's a book of gospel. It's a book of "God is holy. We are sinful. Here's the law. Here's to prove it." And it's a book of "God is merciful. And he wants to save you and give you mercy and grace, but that will only be applied to your life if you repent and believe in his provision."

And that provision in the Old Testament took the forms of sacrificial system, the Passover lamb, the skin coverings in the garden. I mean we could go on and on. Those forms were actually types. They were actually preparing the way for the greater reality and the greater reality is Jesus. Everything in the Old Testament—the sacrificial system, the Exodus story, every prophet, every priest, every king—all of that stuff is preparing the way for Jesus. Every

message from every prophet is preparing us for his greater word. Every priest and their compassion in the Old Testament is preparing us for his even greater compassion for sinners, his even greater intercession for those who pray in Jesus' name.

Every king in the Old Testament, every judge who rules and reigns, is a type and a symbol of an even greater rule, an even greater reign, an even greater king, and that king is Jesus. That's what Paul's saying. It's a righteousness. It's in Jesus. It's righteousness. It's apart from the law. But everything in the law and the prophets has actually been preparing us for this righteousness. And so we can have confidence that it is from the Lord. And Christ and Christ alone enables God to be just and the justifier of those who believe.

Christ alone can save. Look at it again, verse 23. All "have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified"—I would say all can be justified—"by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." How can righteousness be received? It's not through human effort, it's an act of divine grace, it is a gift, a gift of grace through the redemption. So, how is it that God, through Christ, becomes both just and the justifier of those who believe? How does Jesus solve the problem of righteousness?

That's the question, right? Because we want— If God exists, he needs to be a God of justice who is holy, who by no means clears the guilty. But he also needs to be a God of mercy and grace and compassion. How does Jesus enable God the Father to be both of those things? Well, according to Paul, there's two things really. Number one, Jesus becomes our redeemer. It's a word that means he pays the price. If you owed me a hundred bucks and you couldn't pay it back, and so someone came and paid the hundred dollars to me, I would say they're your redeemer.

They've redeemed you from your slavery to me. Paul says Jesus is our redeemer from our slavery to sin. He's ransomed us. He's paid the price to set us free from the devil, to set us free from slavery to sin. He is our redemption. So we're justified. He becomes the justifier by grace as a gift through redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The second word that he uses is the word propitiation, and that's a big fancy, long, hard-to-pronounce word that just means atoning sacrifice. And the Greek word for propitiation, if you look in the Greek Old Testament—the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, but there's a Greek version called the Septuagint.

And when you look at the Septuagint translation and you take this Greek word for propitiation and you say, where does this show up in the Old Testament? What's fascinating is it shows up as a description of what's called the mercy seat in the temple. And the mercy seat in the temple was a gold-covered platform in the Holy of Holies, which only the high priest went into and only once a year. And it was the mercy seat. That was the platform on which the sacrifice for the day of atonement was made.

When the Old Testament sacrificial system said we are going to sacrifice this bull or goat or whatever to pay the penalty for our sins, they put the blood of that animal on the mercy seat. And so what Paul is saying is Jesus is our mercy seat. It is the blood of Jesus that makes atonement for sin. He's our substitute. He stands in our place for our sin. Jesus is the fulfillment of every sacrifice in every Old Testament temple and every sprinkle of blood on every mercy seat. Does that make sense?

So he's our redeemer. He's redeemed us from our debt, but he's also our atoning sacrifice. He bears the penalty that we deserved. So God is holy. In other words, he does not compromise his holiness. His holiness is intact, but he also displays his mercy and his grace. And when you look at the cross of Jesus Christ, you see both truths. He is a God of truth who by no means clears the guilty; sins must be punished, and that punishment is experienced and was absorbed by Jesus Christ on the cross. But yet he's also a God of mercy and grace and compassion, and that mercy and grace and love are seen in that Jesus, who did not deserve to die and who did not owe us a thing, willingly, voluntarily laid down his life as an atoning sacrifice so that he could pay our sin debt.

No greater love, Jesus says, has anyone than that they laid down their lives for their friends, and that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That's how Jesus enables God the Father to become just and justifier. He goes on—this is really language of the Day of Atonement. On the Day of Atonement, They would bring these two goats and one goat was sacrificed and the blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. You don't want to be that goat. All right. The second goat, that's the goat you want to be.

The second goat was called the scapegoat. Has anyone ever heard the phrase scapegoat before? The scapegoat wasn't killed. It's kind of like that dumb turkey pardon that the president does every year. The scapegoat was not sacrificed. The scapegoat kind of stood at the front of all the people and the high priest confessed the sins of all of Israel and spoke them over the head of that goat and then they would release that goat and he'd be like, "Bye," and he would walk away and he would never be seen again. And it was it was symbolic of God saying to his people, "I choose not to see your sin.

I choose to separate your sins as far as the east is from the west." And what Paul is saying is so fascinating. Paul is saying God did not forgive their sins, okay? The blood of bulls and goats does not take away sins. And we know that, obviously, if you murdered someone and I was like, "Don't worry, I know they murdered your mom, but I sacrificed a goat, so he's good," right? You'd be like, "No. I don't care about some goat dying." The blood of bulls and goats do not take away sin.

Paul's saying that was just signs, symbols pointing to the real substitute. And it's Jesus. And the reason that his death is sufficient is because he's not just a dude, he's not just a human. He's God in the flesh, the God who is righteous the God who is holy, took on flesh and he

lived a sinless perfect life of love and obedience before the Father. He did what Adam didn't do, he did what we don't do, and then he took that sinless perfect life and he says, "I'll pay the price. I'll be the substitute.

I'll stand in their place. I'll absorb their sin." And Paul says that's why he's just and justifier. Look at verse 25. Jesus making atonement for sin was to show God's righteousness. This is what his righteousness looks like. Because in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins. In other words, he was patient in the past. But the reason that he was patient back then was to show his righteousness at the present time. The blood of the bulls and goats weren't cleansing them from sin. He was being patient with the blood of bulls and goats so that Jesus would make atonement.

So that at the present time he might be seen as the just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. In Jesus—Psalm 85:10—in Jesus, unfailing love and truth have met together. In Jesus, righteousness and peace have kissed. 2 Corinthians 5:21: He made him who knew no sin—Jesus—to be sin. Why? So that in him, in other words, when we repent and we believe in Jesus Christ for salvation, in him we might become the righteousness of God. We can have our hearts healed. We can have our brokenness addressed. We can have our nakedness covered not by self-effort, not by some religion, not by idolatry of worshiping sex, drugs, and rock and roll, but by faith and repentance in God's provision for us in the person of Jesus Christ.

And if that's not your understanding of the gospel, you don't really understand the gospel. That's why this message changes people's lives. Because when they finally realize it's not about what I do, it's about what Christ has done. And it's not about my effort. Even Christian people who think, "Well, I've been in church my whole life and I've served the Lord and I've done all these great things, and, you know, God ought to bless me and God ought to be happy with me"—you do not want to play that game, Christian. That is not where your righteousness resides.

Your righteousness is a gift of grace, always and forever. It's not about what you do, it's about what he's done. And when you live in that truth that I'm far worse off than I could have ever imagined, but even though that was true, God loved me, and he's proven his love, not with the words on a page, but with a person in human history who lived a sinless life and died on the cross, and three days later God raised him from the dead—that historical, earth-shattering, paradigm-shifting event changed the world and it has changed my life.

Because I believe he didn't just die for people in general. I believe he died for me. That changes the way you live. It changes the way you see everything in the world. And so as we enter into a time of response, I want to encourage you to ask the Lord, "Help me to remember this. Help me to remember this gospel. Help me to remember that the ground is level at the foot of the cross, which means two things. Number one, I have no business

judging another person because they don't measure up; it's God's business to judge, not mine.

And I may have been a little bit better, but I am just as guilty. I'm just a religious sinner. They're an irreligious sinner. We're both sinners." The ground is level at the foot of the cross. And you need to remember that as a Christian. Because there's a temptation the longer you serve Jesus to think somehow he's impressed with you because of your gifts and your efforts and your sacrifice and all of these things. It's an offering. It's pleasing to the Lord, yes, but it's not your salvation. It is not your righteousness.

The ground is level at the foot of the cross. Nothing in my hands I bring, only to the cross I cling. And second application is ask the Holy Spirit to help you remember that Jesus Christ can restore what was lost in the fall. We all lost glory in the fall. We've been looking for righteousness. You're here this morning. If you're not a Christian this morning, I know your story is a story of looking for righteousness. You're trying to be whole. And you're here because you're looking for answers. And this morning, God's giving you the answer that your righteousness is available through repentance and faith in Jesus.

"It's not something you do, it's something I give you as a gift of grace." But you've got to receive it. God loves you. You know you blew it. Christ has paid for it. He is the righteousness of God, but you've got to receive him. And so as we enter into a time of response, if you've never publicly confessed your sin and trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation, today is the day to do that. And I think you should do it publicly. Jesus always called for a public response. And so you can come down to the front and say, "I want to give my life to Jesus this morning."

You can scan this QR code we're going to put up here as a public way of saying, "I need to tell somebody about this decision I'm making this morning." Maybe you say, "I thought I was a Christian. I grew up in church. I thought it was just about what I did. I thought it was about my works, and now I see it's about what Jesus has done." That's where true righteousness is. Salvation is in no other name than the name of Jesus. And so if he's calling you, if the Holy Spirit's calling you this morning to respond, then I would invite you to respond as Taylor leads us.

Father, we thank you for this word and we ask you that we truly would be people who find our righteousness in nothing else than Jesus' blood and righteousness. Dare not trust the sweetest frame, but we would only trust in Jesus' name. As we sang earlier, what should I gain from his reward? I cannot give an answer. I contribute nothing to my salvation. I know this with all my heart. His blood has paid my ransom. Jesus, would you help us to remember that you are our redeemer? You are our righteousness. You are what makes us holy before God.

You are what covers us so that we can receive love and mercy and grace from God. And you are who stood in our place for our sin. You gave everything, and so who are we to withhold anything from you? Would you help us to see it? Would you help us to remember it? Would you help us to live in light of it? And we pray it in Jesus′ name. Amen.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "finally in verse 27"; "so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" is the end of Romans 3:26 (verse 27 begins "Then what becomes of our boasting?"). Source: Romans 3:26–27 (ESV), BibleGateway. ↩
2. Transcript note: the lines that follow ("we have all become like one who is unclean… our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment… we all fade like a leaf") are Isaiah 64:6, which Paul does not quote in Romans 3; the catena in Romans 3:10–18 is drawn from Psalms 14:1–3/53:1–3, 5:9, 140:3, 10:7 and 36:1 and Isaiah 59:7–8. Source: Romans 3:10–18 and Isaiah 64:6 (ESV, with cross-references), BibleGateway. ↩