

V. The Gospel of Jesus Christ in Biblical Perspective
The Majesty, Message and Ministry of the Gospel
“The Gospel Is a Message About Grace”
Romans 3:21–31
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October 7, 2012 – Morning Sermon

We continue in the series on the majesty, message and ministry of the Gospel. Romans 3:21-26 says [21] *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—[22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. [26] It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I would like to answer a question that I believe every single one of you who have heard the Gospel have asked this question - did Jesus have to die on the cross for me to be saved? Let me put it another way. God could You have saved me some other way than Jesus dying on the cross? If you have heard the Gospel you have asked yourself that question at some point. It’s okay to ask that question. Jesus asked that question. In His humanity as He goes to the garden of Gethsemane He looks to the Father with the cross just hours away. The cup of God’s wrath is just hours away. Jesus prays “Father, if there be any way let this cup pass from Me yet not My will be done but Thy will be done. Is there another way Father?” To answer that question we go to the Gospel message.

I want to take a brief time right now to tell you where we’ve been. Be patient with me because I’m trying to build this. The reason we are doing the majesty, message and ministry of the Gospel series is because it is like a three story house. Story number one is the majesty of the Gospel. Story number two is the message of the Gospel. Story number three is the ministry of the Gospel and we are doing this because the Gospel is the foundation, the formation and the motivation of the Christian life.

It is the foundation because it is how you are saved. It is how you live. It is the foundation of every Christian doctrine whether it has to do with leadership or citizenship or the family, marriage, husband, wife, fellowship, worship, etc. The Gospel is at the foundation of how every person is saved and how every doctrine is to be taught from the Word of God. Secondly it’s the formation. It guides us in our Christian life. Thirdly, it’s the motivation, not the only motivation, but it’s the primary, saturating motivation of the Christian life. So we are taking our time to walk our way through it story by story.

Story number one is the majesty of the Gospel and the majesty of the Gospel is wrapped up in the very word that is translated in your Bible Gospel which is Euangelion. It’s a phrase that would be used to talk about the decree announcing victory when a king had fought his enemies. That’s how Isaiah uses it when he says publish glad tidings, publish the Gospel. Get up on the mountain. Get up on the wall. Publish Good News.

The King has won the victory. So what is the majesty of the Gospel? It's not a proposal. It's not advice. It's not an opinion.

The Gospel is the Royal Proclamation that the King of glory has triumphed over all of His enemies and has saved His people from their sins. We were helpless and enemies and Christ has come. He descended into the valley of death and ascended up to the hill of Calvary. He fought the battle against sin, death, hell and the grave. He has won the victory and has saved His people from their sins. He has fulfilled His mission. You shall call His Name Jesus. Why? He will save His people from, not in, their sins to Himself and the Gospel is this royal proclamation that the King has won the victory.

Then we looked at the message of the Gospel. It's important that we get the message right because the Bible doesn't talk about a gospel, it talks about The Gospel. I'm not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. So it is the Gospel that saves us. Paul says if anyone distorts the Gospel he calls down the curses of the living God on anyone who would distort the Gospel to deceive people. The Bible says it is through the foolishness of the message preached that we're being saved. So what is the Gospel? Here we are in the second story.

I have tried to lay down the five courses, or blocks of the Gospel. There are five elements of the Gospel message. I have pulled that out of J. I. Packer's book which I've recommended to you and he took his from the Apostle Paul. The first element is the doctrine of God. The second element is man is a sinner. The third element is Jesus Christ. The fourth element which we will look at in this study is grace. The fifth element is faith and repentance. This is the way Paul does it in the book of Romans. He brings out God's glory which we're suppressing. Then he covers man as a sinner in Romans 2 and 3. Then there is God's remedy in Romans 4 and 5. Then he talks about the message of grace in Romans 6, 7, and 8. Then the life of faith and repentance is covered throughout the rest of the book of Romans. It is a glorious, wonderful message with those five basic elements.

Here is another way to think of it. Why do we lay those five elements down? They are merely the elements that reflect how the Bible talks about the Gospel. How does the Bible talk about the Gospel? In Romans 1 it is the Gospel of God. Element number one is who God is. Then it says the Gospel is the proclamation of remission of sins. It is called the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is the third element. It is also called the Gospel of grace which is the fourth element. What does the Gospel call you to? It calls you to faith and repentance. So these elements are the basic building blocks of the Gospel.

The first and foremost one is the doctrine of God. Why do we say this is the first and foremost? If you get this one wrong nothing else makes sense because you can't have sin without the doctrine of God. You can't know the cost of sin unless you know God as Judge. You can't understand who Jesus is as the Son of God unless you understand the doctrine of God. You can't understand grace without understanding the doctrine of God because it's God's grace. It's not my grace or Briarwood's grace. So you have to get the first one right. First and foremost the Gospel message is the Triune God of glory saves sinners by His grace and for the praise of the glory of His grace.

The second element we covered is the course that it is a message about sin. Why do we sin? It's because we're born sinners. In Adam we sinned. When Adam sinned we sinned. So we are born with a bad record. We are born with a bad heart which is why we

lead a sinful life. When Adam sinned we sinned and therefore we're born sinners which puts us under God's judgment because God says I will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. The soul that sinneth shall surely die. God's justice demands it. So I am inescapably under God's judgment but I'm also aware that there is no hope within me. That brings us to the glorious statement of number three.

The third element is the message about Jesus Christ. It is God's remedy to our malady. It is God's solution to our situation. Here I am a sinner dead in my sins, depraved that my sins pollute everything I say and do. My thoughts, words and deeds are constantly in rebellion against God. I am rightly under His judgment and I cannot save myself and none of you can save me. Therefore I have no hope except God's grace and mercy and that's found in Jesus Christ. It is Good News. I can't understand the Good News until I understand the bad news. The Good News is Jesus.

Last week some people said to me "Last week I loved that sermon on Jesus but I didn't like the other one the week before on sin." I understand that and I didn't love preaching it but I do know that to the extent that you do not understand sin, it will diminish your adoration and appreciation of Jesus. To the extent that you do not understand the dire situation you and I are in, that we're dead in our sins, we are under God's judgment and He will judge sin and sinners, then not only do you not appreciate the remedy it will diminish the effects of the remedy in your life.

When you don't understand the depth of your sin and therefore you don't understand the heights of your Redeemer that will affect your worship. Very easily worship becomes about me instead of Him who saved me. When I understand where I was and what He did now I want to praise Him. It will affect your desire to want to evangelize. It will affect your joy. Until you understand your previous condition and sin, then you understand who Jesus is and what He did for you now that is what gives you joy. It is not a preacher with clichés, manipulating your emotions that give you joy but you'll have the true joy when you know you are a sinner. I have the same heart as that Hitler guy and more than that I have the same heart of those who crucified Jesus. I have a Christ killing heart but God sent His Son to save me.

I tried to illustrate this before by talking about a guy who was guilty of attempting to assassinate the king. So his penalty would be death. He is on death row and he also has a terminal illness within him. One day a man comes to him and unlocks the door. In comes the king's physician. The king's physician treats him and he is healed from his personal problem of his terminal illness. Then he unfolds a document that says "Harry Reeder guilty of treason is now pardoned, forgiven and more than that is declared innocent with no charges, no condemnation and has now been set free." In wonderment I walk out of the cell and there the king's robe is put around me. I am taken to the king's home. I said "Why did this happen?" It was because the King gave His Son to die for you and that's why it happened. He healed you and you no longer have a bad heart. You have a new heart and a new record. The robe of the King and His signet ring are given to you. You have been brought to the King's family from which the King had sent His Son to die for you to save you.

That begs the question, why would He do that for me? It is because He loved me. Why did He love me? The Gospel is a message of grace. It is because of God's grace that He sent His Son to set me free from my sins to Himself. He sent Him and so now I have a Gospel called the Word of the cross. We preach Christ and Him crucified. He

saved us from our sins but you don't just preach that anybody was crucified. It was Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of Man. He was crucified and it's the Word of the cross. Notice the Gospel isn't the word of the manger. The Gospel isn't the word of the tomb. The Gospel isn't the word of the crown. There was a manger and a virgin birth. There was an empty tomb, praise the Lord. He does have crown. He is coming again but it's the word of the cross because it's at the cross, the grace of God sent the love of God and the holiness of God is met by the love of God to save sinners to the glory of God by the grace of God. There at the cross is where God's justice was met and God's love saved me because His Son died for me. He rose again and why God's abundant, transforming, free, life changing grace, that's why. That is the only answer I can give you.

I know of no other passage I love to read more on this than Romans 3. So what is Gospel grace? To understand that let's walk our way through this text. Romans 3:21 says *[21] But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—* So there is a righteousness that doesn't come in my relationship to the Law. There is a righteousness I have that comes apart from my relationship to the Law. What does the Law do? It keeps telling me I'm a sinner, I'm under judgment and I need a Savior. I'm thankful for the Law because it shows me the malady. I'm saved apart from the Law yet the Law and the Prophets were the instrument through which God said "I'm sending a Savior for you." The Law can't save me but it bore witness that God was sending a Savior for me.

So Romans 3:21b – 22 says *although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—[22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.* So today if you believe in Jesus Christ not only have your sins been taken away through His sacrifice but His righteousness, His robe clothes you. It wraps you up and makes you not only forgiven but innocent. You are accepted in the beloved. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. How do I get that? By believing in Jesus Christ and everyone who believes has that glorious position of salvation. Let's go further.

Romans 3:22b-23 says *For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...* That verse sums up the first three chapters of Romans concerning the Jews, Greeks, religious, irreligious where everybody has sinned. Since everyone has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God how are we saved? Romans 3:24a says *[24] and are justified by his grace as a gift...* The wages of sin are death but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ. I am saved by His grace as a gift (24b) *through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...* Jesus paid the price for my salvation as a gift of grace. The gift was free to me but it wasn't free to God. It cost Him His Son to give me this free gift by grace.

Why did Jesus go to that cross? Romans 3:25-26a says *[25] whom God put forward (The Father sent His Son) as a propitiation by his blood, (how do I get saved by that redeeming, substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on my behalf?) to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. [26] It was to show his righteousness at the present time...* Here is my life of sin and God was forbearing. He was patient and not because He was winking at sin. The soul that sinneth shall surely die but He was patient because a time was coming where He would send His Son who would go to the cross. All of my sins in

thought, word and deed all broke on Him at the cross and there He paid for it. What is the result of that? Let's continue.

Romans 3:26 says [26] *It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.* How do I get just? It is by the Justifier. Who is the Justifier? It is God. How did He justify me? It was by sending His Son. What did His Son do? He paid for all of my sins so God is holy and just yet in His grace and mercy He found a way when there was no way to save me through Jesus Christ who is The Way, The Truth and The Life that I might have everlasting life... *that He might be just and justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.* In this passage it says all who believe are saved, right? Right but now look it says 'to the one who believes.' Everyone who believes is saved. He will lose none of His people. He came to save His people from their sins. How are they saved? They are saved one by one. It is not a group plan. You must personally come to Christ by faith in Him. So here we are saved as a gift of His grace and God has done it in a way where He is just and justifier, so how does that happen?

I want to give you a brief statement about God's grace. What is Gospel grace? It is that God has freely given us all things necessary to save His people from their sins. It cost Him but He freely gives it. Romans 8:30-32 says [30] *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.* [31] *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* [32] *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* That doesn't mean you have a title right to a Mercedes, enough with that garbage. It means that whatever it takes to get you to eternity where He knew you, predestined you, in time where He called you, justified you, into eternity where He glorified you that whatever it takes where God is just and justifier to get you to Him from your sins, He freely gives all of those things by His grace.

This has always helped me about grace. I like to look at three words – justice, mercy and grace. What is justice? That is when God gives us what we deserve. What do I deserve since I'm a sinner? I deserve judgment. I deserve all of hell to break upon my head. When people talk to me about the sovereignty of God and salvation and say "That's not fair" you're right. God made it fair because He put His Son there but it's not fair in the sense that I don't want fairness. I need grace and God has found a way to be gracious and just. How does He do that? He does it by giving us all things necessary therefore justice is when God gives me what I deserve. Mercy is when God withholds from me what I do deserve. Grace is what He gives me what I don't deserve. Justice demands that He brings judgment upon the soul that sinneth but in mercy He withheld it. Then He poured it out on His Son who by His grace took my place and now I get the gift of eternal life because God has given me what I don't deserve when He put His Son in my place.

So what does that look like? Here are three thoughts. We have a Triune God. God the Father gives sending grace. Just think of all He did. God gave you His Word. You would never know Him. You would never know your sins. You would have never know salvation if He hadn't given you His Word. He gave you Apostles, Prophets and people who died for you to get this Bible in your language. He has given people who came and told you about Jesus. God has given us so much but nothing compares that

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. In the passage we just looked at in Romans 3 it said 'God put forward His Son.' Isn't that an amazing statement? God gave His Son and then sent Him to the cross to die for our sins.

This is so trivial and I feel so inadequate saying it this way but I have three kids. I love you but if you're about to die and the only way you can get saved from dying is for me to put one of my kids in your place, you might as well get ready to check out. I can't imagine doing that. I can't imagine how God gave His only Son in my place. Why? I didn't want Him to. I didn't ask for Him to. He didn't need me. I needed Him but I didn't want Him. He didn't need me but wanted me. To take me from my sins to Himself He put His Son there.

You not only have the sending grace of God the Father, but you have the saving grace of God the Son. God the Son came and then gave His life on the cross. I don't think I can spend the rest of my life at the garden of Gethsemane trying to understand what was going on there. Here is Jesus who is the Son of God and Son of Man, He comes into this world fully God yet shrouded the privileges of His deity, not giving up His deity, still God and takes upon Himself full humanity, born under the Law so He can give me a righteousness apart from the Law. He lives for thirty years. His playmates would trip Him. The sand would burn His legs. People would take things from Him but in thought, word or deed He never sinned against God or others. He was fully a man. He wasn't sexually neutered. He wasn't a eunuch yet never did He commit adultery in mind, thought, word or deed. He didn't sneak in the back to take a cookie His mother told Him not to.

I want you to understand that for the thirty years He was on this earth He never sinned but He loved the Father with all of His heart, soul and mind and everyone else around Him. He grew up in a little bitty place with brothers and sisters. Have you ever tried that? I did. I had three sisters. Yet He never sinned and when He got to His public ministry the Father let you know that because as He is baptized to begin His ministry as Prophet, Priest and King the Father says "This is My Son, I take pleasure in Him. I am well pleased." Then Jesus goes into three years of ministry being rejected and just days before He is to go to the cross He is at the Mount of Transfiguration, the Father says again about His Son "This is My Son in whom I am well pleased, listen to Him." Then days later He goes to a garden and the agony of what is facing Him is so enormous that the capillaries in His very body are bursting and blood is pouring from the pores of His skin. He is agonizing in prayer as He knows what is about to happen and what He has come to do which is to take our judgment for all the sins of all of His people for all of eternity. For every moment we have sinned up into heaven there they are being stored up and He is about to go to the cross where the damn will break and all of the wrath of God for all of the sins of His people is about to fall on Him, the righteous Son of God.

Jesus says "Father, is there any way that this cup can pass from Me, yet not My will be done" and from the moment He says 'not My will be done' until the resurrection He is in the posture of a criminal. He is arrested. He is tried. He is declared guilty. He goes to a cross between two criminals. If you would have walked by that day you probably would have said "That's a criminal, that's a criminal." He is taken down and put into a borrowed tomb. There the humiliation goes to the depths. The righteous Son of God is in the posture, the position and under the judgment of the Father as the criminal because He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf. This Father who said this is My

Son in whom I am well pleased, now this Son will be on the cross drinking that judgment. Now this Son will say [46] “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” that is, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Matthew 27:46b) There is no pleasure then. It is nothing but the unmixed wrath of God and Jesus is drinking the cup and He can’t put it down. If one ounce is left then we can’t be saved but He drinks it to the bottom.

Then when it’s empty and the Father pulls it back from His lips on the cross and all of the fiery hell, isolation and judgment has fallen upon Him. He descends into hell to pay for all of our sins for all of eternity of all of His people. It is at that very moment when it is finished and the Father pulls the cup back that Jesus declares “*Tetelestai* – It is finished!” He drank it to the bottom and you can be made right with God by His grace. Did Jesus have to go to the cross? No, the Bible could record this, “For the wages of sin is death (period).” God has to judge you and your sin. He didn’t have to save you. That was grace. He didn’t have to send His Son. His Son didn’t have to come and go to that cross for you. That was grace but His Son went to the cross and died for you because He loved you and gave Himself for you to loosen you from your sins to Himself and wrapped you up for all eternity. And nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ because His grace is greater than all of our sins.

But wait! I look out and see Asian, black, white, old, young, poor etc and how did you get to Him when you’re dead? The Father sent the Son and then the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit in searching grace. He didn’t find you in an ocean of sin floundering but He found you in the bottom of the ocean with a ten million pound rock upon you. He threw the rock off and brought you up into the life boat of eternity into salvation. He didn’t find you in an intensive care unit. He found you in a morgue and brought you from death unto life. Remember when Jesus told Lazarus to come forth after he had been dead for three days? That’s what happened to you. The Holy Spirit came and said to me “Harry Reeder, come out of that death! Come out of that tomb!” Enough of this notion that here I am in my sins and I say “Okay God I’ll let you save me.” No! A sovereign, sending, saving, searching grace found me. I was dead! He said “Come out!” and then I came from death unto life.

So everyone of you who know Jesus Christ – the sovereign, sending, searching, saving grace of Christ has found you and saved you and has brought you forth. That is my takeaway. This God who is sovereign, searching and saving, sent the Holy Spirit who searched for you. By the way, how did He find you? You were dead and all of a sudden you had eyes to see and ears to hear. You were dead in your sins and you came to life by coming to Christ in faith and repentance. How did He do that? He used somebody that He had already saved. Do you hear that key sliding into the cell door? Do you hear it turn? Hear the cell door open. In the hands of the church He has given the keys of the Kingdom. What you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, what you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matthew 18:18).

God sovereignly will use you. He used somebody whom He had saved to come to you. Now He’ll use you to go to somebody else. So us challenging you to share the Gospel with one person this week isn’t limitation. You may be thinking you have more than one then praise the Lord and go for it. We are at least encouraging you and stimulating you to share the Gospel. This week slide the key of the Kingdom of the Gospel in the lock. God used somebody in your life and He’ll use you in the life of someone else.

Perhaps you are reading this today and God moved you to come searching. What you heard is that you didn't need a therapist or a coach but you need a Savior. I have Good News and because of God's grace there is One. There is only One and you must personally come to Him but He is ready to receive you. The Father will give all things necessary for you to know Him, love Him, follow Him and even though in the future you'll be prone to wander He'll keep bringing you back. He will take you to glory. I'm so grateful I don't have to stand here today to tell you that you need Harry Reeder to baptize you, then you need to do what Briarwood tells you to do and you may get to heaven. I love baptism. I love to preach the Word to tell you what God has called you to do but I'm so grateful that I can tell you that because of God's grace the Father sent the Son who saves you on the cross, from your sins to Himself and then He has sent the Holy Spirit to call you from death unto life. It's all because of His grace that's wonderful, marvelous, abounding and amazing! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. I can't believe that it took the infleshment of God the Son to make a way for me to be saved and then even beyond that You gloriously did that. Your Son drank the cup to give me a cup of life that's unfathomable. Then You even allow us to not only taste of that grace and be saved by grace but You allow us to be an instrument of grace in the lives of others. I praise Your Name! If you would like to come to Christ today, by His grace you don't have to go get better, just come to Him. He came to save you. I have some things to give you to help you grow in grace and in your relationship with Christ. The grace of God has appeared bringing salvation, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Challenge for this week:

By God's grace and His glory I do prayerfully commit to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with at least one person this week. You sign that and say that between you and the Lord.