

SESSION 3

Salvation



QUESTION 1:

When have you been happy for someone to step in and fix something you couldn't?

THE POINT

Jesus made it possible for us to be righteous before God.

THE PASSAGE

Romans 3:20-28

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I am an American, but I have Middle Eastern characteristics. So when I was leading a trip to Egypt, it was easy to assume I was a native-born Egyptian. On one occasion, a man walked up to me and immediately began speaking Arabic. He seemed to be in a panic when it became obvious I was confused by his words. I was in a situation I could not resolve and needed a mediator. Thankfully a translator stepped in and did just that: he served as a go-between and made conversation possible.

Mediators are often needed to get two parties on the same page. Businesses frequently use them, legal disputes sometimes call for them, and unfortunately, many marriages need them. When we need reconciliation, a mediator can “save the day.”

One area where we all need a mediator is in our relationship with God. While the Egyptian and I were separated by language, we are separated from God by our sin. It’s a rift we cannot fix. We desperately need a mediator to step in. Thankfully, God has provided a mediator in Jesus.

Romans 3:20-22

20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

21 But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;

22 Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:

KEY WORDS: Justified (v. 20)—Refers to the idea of being declared righteous or guiltless. It has the idea of attaining right standing before God.

Righteousness (v. 21)—Carries a double meaning, referring both to the legal action God takes in declaring believers to be without guilt or sin and to the characteristic that only can be attributed to God Himself.

We can spend much of our lives striving to get noticed and approved. We work at school to receive adequate grades and accolades. We work hard at our jobs in hopes of being noticed, approved, and even rewarded. We do all we can so that our family members will return the love we show them at home. Our goal is to be validated for a job well done. Many people approach a relationship with God the same way: “I’m going to do a lot of good things so God will notice and approve of me.”

A lot of people are pleased with themselves about their good works. They look at all their triumphs and think highly of themselves. This is easy to do as long as you compare yourself with the right people: people who are obviously living sinful lives—whose sins are “worse” than yours. Jesus told a parable of an arrogant Pharisee who prayed, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this

publican” (Luke 18:11). This is a dangerous viewpoint because the person is not holding himself up to the right standard.

The right standard is God’s perfect law. In theory, keeping the law would bring us into a right relationship with God, but the reality is none of us can keep the law. The law requires absolute perfection. Many of us have tried to pick up a sport or a musical instrument only to discover that, no matter how hard we work, we’ll never be any good at it. But even those musical virtuosos or exceptionally gifted athletes never reach absolute perfection. When we compare our efforts with the demands of a perfect law, we all fall short. The law reveals our sinfulness and points us to Christ who perfectly fulfilled the law.

Many Americans are fascinated with British royalty. We closely follow the lives of the royal family, seeing them as elevated above the rest of us. Certainly the royal family approaches life quite differently than the average British citizen. In this passage, Paul was writing to a group who acted like royalty; they believed their birthright allowed them special access to God. They were God’s chosen people, and He had given them—and them alone—His law. But possessing the law was not the same as keeping the law, and in that regard, they were no different than the worst sinner. “There is no difference.”

But righteousness is still possible. The law is definitely a part of God’s redemption story. By revealing our inability to achieve righteousness, it points to the grace of God and what Christ has done to achieve righteousness for us. Jesus was born into the world. He is righteous and never sinned. He lived a perfect life, yet He died a sinner’s death. Jesus kept the law perfectly but died in our place because we could not keep the law. He is completely righteous, and He imputed His righteousness to us. The sin He died for was ours and His death atoned for all the wrongs we had committed. Through His sacrifice for us, we are declared righteous by faith in His blood.

The law helps us put into words why we are not able to measure up and make ourselves righteous before God. The law clears out any notion of self-sufficiency. It is through faith in Christ alone we are declared righteous. “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference.”

QUESTION 2:

How do people define or determine right and wrong in our culture?

Romans 3:23-24

23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;

24 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

KEY WORD: Redemption (v. 24)—The act of “buying back” by paying a ransom price. Christ paid the ransom price for our sins with His own blood.

Romans 3:23 is a wonderful verse many of us memorized quite early in life. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” What an important truth! No one is able to reach the standard set by a holy God. We all end up under God’s judgment and condemnation.

But verse 24 is just as important. In the middle of humanity’s wreck, God stepped in and introduced righteousness to those who believe. Redemption is the act of clearing a debt or making a payment in order to take possession of something. That is what Christ did for us; it is through Christ that those who believe are redeemed. Christ paid our debt and took possession of us.

Consequently, we were able to take possession of some things too: forgiveness, freedom, and eternal life, just to name a few.

God's justification is given freely to all who believe in His Son, Christ Jesus. God's free gift is hard for us to fully understand. People can give a gift, but they often have a subtle—or not so subtle—expectation that they will get something in return. Free offers from businesses often come with hidden costs. And who gives a gift to someone who doesn't even like him? Yet God freely gave for our justification.

While Christ's work of justification is free, it is not cheap. God would not declare anyone righteous without dealing with that person's sin. Insert Jesus! Christ willingly gave His life to bring us back to Himself. His act allows us to be in a deep, saving relationship with the God of our universe.

Why would God do this? When we consider our sinfulness and rebellion against holy God, the only answer comes down to love. His work was provided by His grace but it was motivated by His overwhelming love for us. We didn't measure up. We were hopelessly lost and utterly incapable of fixing our problems, but while we were still messy and broken, God gave us the incredible gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. It is Jesus Christ who allows us to experience redemption. It is Jesus Christ who has given us the opportunity to be brought back to God and restore our relationship with Him. Why would we not be incredibly thankful for someone who fully paid the whole debt we owed?

When I was a college student, money was often in short supply. Gordon, a man in my home church, would periodically send me cash, and it always seemed to come at critical moments where I needed help. Gordon was a great man who really loved our family. I could always count on him to help me out.

We all need people to step into our lives and help us—and that is certainly true regarding our salvation. We have all fallen short, but God being rich in mercy, sent Jesus to take our place. With this truth and the promise of Jesus' love for us, God provided a way

for anyone who believes in His Son to be justified. It is through that justification that we are redeemed as sons and daughters of the King.

QUESTION 3:

What evidence have you seen of the truth of our fallen nature?

Romans 3:25-28

25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;

26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

KEY WORD: Propitiation (v. 25)—Removing sin that separates God and man. When the priest sprinkled the sacrificial blood on the mercy seat, it stopped being a place of judgment and became a place of mercy.

When my daughter was younger, she broke something inside a store. I had to come alongside her to help her pay for the broken item. I had to pay and make restitution. In the same way, God has come alongside us, through Jesus Christ, and offered us an opportunity for reconciliation, a payment for our wrong done. We call this atonement.

“Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.” *Propitiation* typically involves two parties for which one has to make amends—propitiation—for wrongdoing. Our sin created a separation between God and us. But in His overwhelming love and grace, God Himself made a way for us to be redeemed and our sin atoned for; He did this through the sacrificial death of His son, Jesus Christ.

We had no role in this atonement for our transgressions. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, *while we were yet sinners*, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, emphasis added). We did nothing to merit Christ’s intervention; He provided salvation purely out of His grace and love.

We lose the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ when we try to add something of ourselves to the equation. This is not to say our actions are unimportant; on the contrary, our works are vital in our faith, but only because they are an expression of the faith we have already placed in the work of Christ. “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (Jas. 2:17). Our works are not a part of atoning salvation, but they are a meaningful expression of our faith in the One who saved us.

QUESTION 4:

How would you describe what it means to have faith in God?

Righteousness can only be achieved through faith in Christ, and that excludes any kind of boasting on our behalf (Eph. 2:8-9). The law was put in place to reveal to us our shortcomings; therefore it gives us no grounds for boasting. Instead, we should say like Paul, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14).

Thankfully, we can be justified through faith. Faith is our complete confidence and trust in Christ. Our faith is in the One

who has completely satisfied God's righteous and holy demands. That, and that alone, is our salvation.

QUESTION 5:

How can our group help one another be more effective in leading others to salvation?

ENGAGE

Use the acrostic below to offer words of thanks or praise to God for the salvation offered through Christ.

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V

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D

LIVE IT OUT

God has paid the ultimate price for our restoration through Jesus' death on the cross. What will you do with that truth?

- ▶ **Believe.** Turn to God in faith and place your trust in Christ. Turn from yourself and turn to Christ who offers salvation through His death and resurrection. If you need help with this, read the inside front cover of this book.
- ▶ **Repent.** Examine your life for any boasting about who you are and what you've done. Confess that to God, and thank Him for His forgiveness. Recognize that anything you have or do is all from His grace.
- ▶ **Share.** This good news is not intended to be kept to yourself. Identify someone you know with whom you can share the gospel of God's salvation.

