

“THE RIGHTEOUS JUSTICE OF GOD.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Romans 3:21-26

Introduction.

We all know the story of David and Bathsheba and her husband Uriah. One afternoon lounging on the roof of his palace David sees Bathsheba bathing in her backyard. His lust turns to desire which turns to sin and she becomes pregnant. In an attempt to cover up his sin, he calls Uriah home from the battle for a weekend of R and R, but Uriah is a man of integrity and honor and he won't go home. So David assigns him to the frontlines where he is killed. Then he marries Bathsheba.

God sends the prophet Nathan to confront David in his sin, David is convicted and repents, Nathan seemingly presumptuously, announces God's forgiveness, "God has taken away your sin." End of story.

But put yourself in the sandals of Bathsheba's father or Uriah's father. What are you thinking about this whole sordid affair? What, the Lord has taken away his sin? This terrible king has raped my daughter, he has murdered my son-in-law, and he just gets away with it, he gets a pass. Where is the righteousness? Where is the justice? If this is the kind of judge God is, He should be impeached.

Justice matters. God has hardwired our universe that justice matters. Justice is part of the moral fabric of the universe. God has put a sense of justice deep in all of us. The reason we know about justice and think about justice and care about justice is because we are made in the image of a just God.

Justice is hardwired into all our consciences. Think about how upset we get over a bad call by an umpire or referee. Some of us have not forgotten the injustice of the blown call by replacement refs at the end of the Green Bay/Seahawks game in September of 2012 that cost us the game.

How about when an incompetent person gets promoted, or a bribe changes an outcome, or if an election is rigged, or a criminal gets off on a technicality, or a crime isn't punished or a judge perverts justice. How young is a child when they first say something isn't fair? Injustice is a part of our fallen world, but when we are the victim of it, we hate it, and justly so.

We need to know God is always just and fair and does what is right by the righteous standards of His own law, by which He judges us. We need to know how the righteous judge of the universe can forgive guilty sinners.

That's the point of verses 25-26. Last week we considered the first three of Paul's uses of the righteousness of God.

3:21, the righteousness of God apart from the works of the law.

3:22, the righteousness of God through faith, to all who believe in Jesus.

3:24, the righteousness of God is declared a gift of grace that justifies.

If we stop reading right there, there is a big problem. How can God do that without making Himself unjust? How can God just pass over sin? How is God going to vindicate His righteousness? How can God justify the ungodly and maintain His righteousness?

3:25-26, the righteousness of God justified and justly given.

If the most important book in the world is the Bible, and the most important book within the Bible is Romans, and the most important paragraph in Romans is verses 21-26, then the most important verse in that paragraph is verse 25 and the most important word in verse 25 is propitiation (Murry Harris).

This is Paul's one word answer to the most important question and problem.

Propitiation.

It is one of the most important words in the Bible. It explains how something seemingly impossible is able to happen. This word is at the root of the Gospel, in fact, without it there is no Gospel.

When we talk about the wrath of God, we are talking about the holiness of God in the face of our sin. Wrath is what our sin and rebellion justly deserve. God cannot love us or show us grace and mercy at the expense of His justice and holiness and righteousness.

So what does God do with His wrath? He propitiates it. It is the way a loving God can show His mercy and grace to us justly, without compromising Himself or winking at sin.

Remember how everything in the Law and the Prophets bears witness to Jesus, anticipates Jesus, His cross and His Gospel. Remember on the annual Day of Atonement Aaron the High Priest would take two unblemished goats to be the sin offering for the people of Israel (Leviticus 16).

The name of the first goat was ***propitiation***, on him was laid the wrath of God representing Christ's work of propitiation. This goat was killed and his blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat inside the Holy of Holies. His death was to appease and satisfy the righteous wrath of God.

The name of the second goat was ***expiation***. On him Aaron laid all the iniquities of the people of Israel with all their transgressions and sins. This goat was sent away into the wilderness to take away all the sins from the presence of God.

The object of propitiation is the wrath of God.

The object of expiation is our sin which must be removed from God's presence.

Propitiation satisfies the justice of God.

Expiation cleanses us from the guilt of sin.

Jesus' work on the cross accomplishes both of these things. Jesus absorbs into His own person all the wrath of God as our substitute, and He removes from us or puts away from us our sin.

Jesus cried out "My God, My God why have you forsaken me" as He drank the full cup of God's holy wrath, and when He had drunk every last drop of it He cried out, "It is finished."

Christ exhausted the full cup of God's wrath and punishment. For all who trust in Him there is no more punishment in the cup. It is empty.

God had only two choices for how He could satisfy His justice: either He sends us to everlasting punishment in hell which we deserve, or He kills His own beloved Son.

Isaiah 53:4-6 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

God gave Himself to save us from Himself. We needed God to save us from God. In God's wrath He hates sinners, in God's propitiation He loves the objects of His wrath so much that He poured it out on Jesus.

I John 4:10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Notice this is God's own doing. In every other religion on earth it is men who try to placate or satisfy the wrath of their gods. They come up with their own pathetic offerings to turn away their bad-tempered gods, dancing, cutting themselves, throwing their children into fire, spinning their prayer wheels, month long fasts. And they never have assurance they have done enough.

Out of pure love God took it on Himself to propitiate His own holy wrath through the sacrifice of His own Son, who took our place, bore our sin, died our death and saved us.

Notice the completeness of what God does. It is one thing to have your sins forgiven. If a criminal has his sins forgiven and is set free, he is just a forgiven criminal. He may not be trusted by others, in a sense he is not fully free, he still has his old nature.

But propitiation does much more. We are not just forgiven with our sins taken away, we are justified in the eyes of God, we are now by the blood of Jesus regarded as a law-abiding citizen with all the freedoms and rights of such a person. Our guilt is removed. We are made righteous, we are reconciled to the Father, we are restored to the full status of adopted sons and daughters, no longer children of wrath. We are reconciled, we are God's favorites, we have His favor.

This is stunning. It is one thing for a traitor to be pardoned, but it is entirely another thing for a traitor to be received as a favored friend by the one betrayed.

Remember the prodigal son when he came to his senses about his sins against his father, and went home and what does he say? "Father, I have sinned against you and am no longer worthy to be called a son. Treat me as one of your servants." But what does the father do? He brings out the best robe to put on him and he calls him his son.

We how are not worthy, are called sons and given the best robe, the robe of Jesus' righteousness.

3:25-26, the righteousness of God anticipated and now come.

There is one more aspect of this righteousness, this matter of the passing over of former sins to show His righteousness in the present time. This points to how God passed over David's sin and is the answer to Bathsheba's father's justified reaction to God's lack of justice for crimes committed.

How was God's wrath appeased for all the sins before the coming of Jesus? Were all the sacrifices in the OT sufficient to satisfy God's righteous justice and wrath? No, but they were a sign meant to point forward to what would satisfy, Jesus.

What was done in the past was evidence of a satisfaction to come, since what was being done could not satisfy God's wrath. Until the death of Jesus there was no price paid big enough to cover it.

God wasn't dismissing His glory, or making little of the honor of Bathsheba or the life of Uriah. God suspended His justice and judgment until the fulness of time when He would reveal how His righteousness could be vindicated. When God forgave David, He was looking ahead to Jesus.

David was saved completely by grace and completely by faith. The Gospel was preached to him, but very dimly. In the NT the light was switched on for all to see clearly.

God appeared not to be just as He suspended the effects of His justice, and passed over the sins committed in the OT under the old covenant. God was waiting for the time when His righteousness would be fully revealed.

They had received the promises, and by faith they received the remission of their sins. This explains how the OT saints could be admitted to heaven before the death of Jesus. Jesus obtained their redemption through His blood.

Hebrews 9:15 [Jesus] is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

It is an act of forbearance, kindness, gentleness, mercy, that rather than pouring out His wrath and judgment all along the way, God restrained Himself until He could make a way for Him to give us His favor.

Implications and application.

People often ask how can a loving God send people to hell? That's easy. He hands us our paycheck which says the wages of sin is death. We are getting what we justly deserve.

The real question is how can a holy God let sinners into heaven? That's the question. That's the serious problem. That's what propitiation makes possible.

Do you see what it cost for God to be both just and our justifier, to be merciful and righteous in forgiving the likes of a David and you and me? Jesus died so God could be righteous and give righteousness to us who are unrighteous.

Every time you see some injustice in the world, in your own life, remember this world is created and ruled by a just Judge, who loves us and has saved us from His just wrath. Let injustice remind you of what that courtroom of God's judgment would be like without our redeemer, our advocate, our mediator, our propitiation who has made us just with God.

Faith

How do we make this great work of God personal? How do we make this real and ours? All of this grace is received by faith. The righteous shall live by faith.

3:22: "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe."

3:25a: "Jesus whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in his blood through faith."

3:26b: "So that he would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

The righteousness of God is for all who believe. Do you want the wrath of God or do you want Jesus to bear it so you don't have to? John 3:36 says the wrath of God remains on him who does not believe in Jesus. Jesus died so you wouldn't have to pay for your own sins. By faith make Jesus your propitiation.

All God requires is that you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, confess Him to be your only Lord and Savior from sin, and believe God loves you with an eternally great love.

Romans 10:13 Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.

When you hear that God's wrath is turned aside from you, what do you feel? Does this stir up anything deep inside of you? Do you feel the intensity and depth of God's love and kindness toward sinners?

Does it give you not only a greater love for God, but for each other? It would be a bad thing if you received this great grace from God, but were not more forgiving of each other, or if you kept track of other's sins or think about how bad their sins are? God's grace and love and forgiveness toward us is meant to profoundly change our hearts and our unity and our fellowship and our making allowances for one another and forgiving one another.

Teach this to your children, teach this to your teenagers, hold on to this as you pray for prodigal children and grandchildren. Plead with God to justify the ungodly, to convince them of their sin and their need of a righteous law-abiding Savior to bring them home to the Gospel. Apply this to your marriages and treat each other the way God treats us.

Who dares to bear a grudge against someone when God doesn't hold grudges against us or count our sins against us? Who won't forgive when God forgives us so much? Do you know why I pray blessing on those who have done me wrong? Because I know the kind of sinner I am and how much I need God's blessing and grace. How can I ask for His blessing and grace if I won't give it?

God loves His Son, God loves His perfect righteousness and obedience. God loves His plan of salvation. God absolutely delights in how it reveals His righteousness and saves us. He loves the cross. Behold the beauty of this salvation and embrace it.

I hope this morning you are more amazed at the grace and love of God. As amazed as Charles Wesley who wrote, "Amazing love, how can it be, that you my Lord should die for me!"

Prayer:

Holy, righteous, just Father, I do not deserve even a glimpse of heaven, and I am completely unable to save myself from sin and death and Satan and hell. Out of pure grace you have given the greatest possible blessing to the least deserving creatures at the greatest imaginable cost to yourself. Through Jesus take away sin and death and hell, and grant to us everything that belongs to Him. For His sake, Amen.