

May 5, 2024

“Justified by Faith”
Lesson 1

Romans 3:21-30

Intro

The Greek poet Homer (8th-9th Century BC) recorded a myth about a king named Sisyphus. This human king figured out a way to avoid his own death: he captured the god of death, Thanatos, thus preventing anyone from being able to die. The consequences of this event were disastrous, so the other gods stepped in to restore the previous order.

When Sisyphus did die, he received an interesting punishment from Thanatos. His task was to roll a heavy stone up a hill. But just as he was about to reach the top, the stone would roll back down. This punishment went on forever. This is where the idea of a Sisyphean task, one which is unachievable no matter how much work is put into it, comes from.

Trying to earn salvation through our own works is a Sisyphean task. It’s an impossible job. There must be another, better, way to achieve salvation. That is what Paul teaches in today’s passage.

Read Romans 3:21-30

1. vs. 21: Paul starts this verse with “But now...”

He is building on the idea he developed just before this one

Rom. 3:20 says, “no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we became conscious of our sin”

For some, the law was their guarantee of being righteous in God’s eyes—

Perfect obedience to the law will accomplish this

However, a correct understanding of God and the law shows this idea to be false

The law wasn’t intended to make one righteous, but to show inability to keep it

Paul separates the law from righteousness here: “apart from the law of righteousness”

This isn’t a new idea with Paul

He notes the “the Law and the Prophets” (the OT) say the same thing

This was God’s view the entire time, not just in Paul’s time

2. vs. 22a: The righteousness that makes one accepted in God’s sight is “in Jesus Christ, to all who believe”

Paul has been developing in all of Romans 3 that no one is righteous by themselves

But “all who believe” in Jesus Christ are righteous

This contrasts with those who seek to do works to make themselves righteous

Those who believe in Christ receive the gift of being *called* righteous

It’s important to remember a key idea here about this righteousness

We are being made right with God, despite our continued imperfect efforts

3. vs. 22b-23: Paul says there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles

He’s referring to the fact that both are fallen in terms of righteousness

If they are both fallen, then both groups need the same solution to attain righteousness

4. vs. 24: The solution needed for both groups is “redemption that came through Christ”
This connects back to vs. 22a, connecting salvation to “all who believe”
This salvation isn’t work-based, a “do-it-yourself” theology
Salvation is given “freely by his grace” (“to all who believe”)
Paul uses the word “redemption” here
To be redeemed is to be bought back, like a slave bought out of bondage
This is the only way that people can achieve salvation
There is nothing we have done that is “good enough” to earn it
5. vs. 25: Christ here is described as a “sacrifice of atonement”
This connects to the OT sacrifice system, where blood was offered as a sacrifice
Once a year, the high priest alone went into the Holy of Holies to offer blood
This blood atoned (paid for) the sins committed by the people
This was Jesus’ purpose in coming to Earth, to pay for people’s sins with His own blood

Forbearance means that God’s patience in not punishing sins as soon as they were done
He allowed animal sacrifices to be used instead for centuries
These sacrifices didn’t solve the problem; they merely pointed toward Jesus
God didn’t overlook sins; He withheld judgment on those sins until Jesus’ death
His sacrifice took away sins once for all (Rom. 9:26 / 10:10)
6. vs. 26: This verse connects God’s righteousness and His justice
God cannot be in the presence of sin; it requires a payment to atone for it
God also desires mercy to those who have sinned; he alone can provide that option
He gives both justice and righteousness to those “who have faith in Jesus”
Again, it is not our actions that earn this righteousness; it is God’s gift to sinners
7. vs. 27: This verse would have hit home with Jewish Christians
It says that bragging about one’s righteousness is *excluded* by faith
Jews took great pride in God’s choosing them and their heritage through Moses
Some boasted about their success in following the law
But salvation is not accomplished by anything a sinful person can do
Therefore, since all are sinners (vs. 23), no one has the right to boast
“The law of faith” overrules the Mosaic law, which requires works to stay righteous
8. vs. 28: This verse is Paul’s summary of what he has been saying so far
Keeping the law does not result in righteousness
Trying to keep the law makes us aware of our shortcomings
Justification/salvation only comes by faith in the atoning work of Jesus Christ
Any works done after being saved are evidence of one’s faith
They are key to showing a living faith, but they are not actions which save a person

9. vs. 29: Paul uses a rhetorical question here (one which has an obvious answer)

God created everything, making Him the God of the Gentiles and the Jews
God has always been interested in all people, in desiring them to know Him
See Is. 42:5-7, Lev. 19:10, Deut. 10:18-19, Genesis 16, 2 Kings 5
Jesus also made it clear that God cares for all people in words and actions
See Matt. 5:43-48, Mark 7:24-30, and John 3:16-18

10. vs. 30: The key to this verse is the phrase “only one God”

If there were multiple gods, there might be multiple ways to justify Jews and Gentiles
But Paul reminds his readers that there is “only one God”

Therefore, there is only His way of bringing salvation to all people
The “circumcised” refers to the Jews and the physical sign of their covenant with God
The “uncircumcised” refers to all Gentiles, who did not get circumcised
Both groups, Paul says, will be justified by their faith in Jesus, not by any kind of works

Application: All human brokenness can be traced back to sin. And we are all broken by sin. It may be sad, but that is the one thing that is true about all of humanity. Like Sisyphus in the intro comments, many of us have tried to overcome sin by our own efforts. But those efforts consistently end in failure and frustration. The true cure for sinful brokenness is also something that is common to all mankind. Jesus is the One who has provided salvation through His sacrificial death on the cross. All who call on Him in faith in His death, burial, and resurrection will receive eternal life, and will also receive the Holy Spirit to lead us in walking a life of hope.

Prayer: Father God, thank You for Your gift of salvation through our faith in Jesus. Thank You that this is a gift to everyone, regardless of race or status, or any other human way of categorizing people. Forgive us when we think we have to earn this gift. It is through Jesus alone that we have salvation. In His precious name, Amen.