**March 17, 2024 Romans 3:10-24**

 ***Righteousness Through Grace***

**Scripture:** *Romans 3:10-24 NRSV*

*(10)as it is written: "There is no one who is righteous, not even one; (11)there is no one who has understanding, there is no one who seeks God. (12)All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, there is not even one." (13)"Their throats are opened graves; they use their tongues to deceive." "The venom of vipers is under their lips." (14)"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." (15)"Their feet are swift to shed blood; (16)ruin and misery are in their paths, (17)and the way of peace they have not known." (18)"There is no fear of God before their eyes." (19)Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. (20)For "no human being will be justified in his sight" by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. (21)But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, (22)the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, (23)since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; (24)they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus…*

**Notes:**

1. “There is no one ***righteous***, not even one.”
	1. We seek the **laws** that will save us.
	2. We are reminded that we still need a ***Savior***, and we still need ***grace***.
2. The ***Love*** of God was supposed to be what they oriented their lives around.
	1. The ***Law*** itself was a good thing,
	2. However, the way the Law was applied became a ***stumbling*** block.
	3. The ***Law*** became a way to keep people ***separated*** from God
3. The difference between ***Jews*** and ***Gentiles***?
	1. Not one is ***better*** than any of the others.
	2. Faith in Christ ***unites*** us and makes us ***equal*** to one another.
	3. The church is to be ***one***in Christ Jesus.
4. We find righteousness through ***faith*** and ***grace***.
	1. The law itself ***assumes*** people will fall ***short*** of it,
	2. Paul’s point is that we all sin, so we all need ***grace***.
	3. Our faith in Jesus is what makes us ***righteous***.
5. Our lives are ***transformed*** because of grace.
	1. There is freedom given without our **deserving** it.
	2. God made a way for us to be in ***relationship*** with Him.
	3. Grace made a way to ***connect*** with God in the righteousness of Jesus.
	4. Grace is extended to us if we are ***willing*** to receive it.

**Script:**

Who is worthy of the Kingdom of God? Who is deserving of the forgiveness of sin? I will tell you straight up, It is not me!!! In my life I have done so many sinful things that I am not sure that I could ever do enough to deserve the forgiveness that I have been given?

What about you? Do you deserve to be forgiven of your sin? Do you deserve to be met by Christ on that day of his return, with a big hug and a welcome home?

 The answer is no. There is nobody born of man who is worthy of such forgiveness. There is no human body who ever walked the face of this planet who deserves the forgiveness we have been offered. We have all been born of sinful beings. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Somebody out there is probably wondering, “What about Jesus?” First Jesus was not born of two human parents, He was born of the Holy Spirit and a virgin womb, found in Mary. Next because of this he was born without sin; never needing to repent and be forgiven of such sin. Also, he lived a life pure and whole without sin. There was no sin found in him.

This brings us to our passage for today, Romans: 3:10-24. Stand with me as we read this passage and if you have your bibles, please turn with me to this passage. Paul has just explained to the Romans these facts. We are all, both Jews and Gentiles, born of sinful humanity. We are all under the power of sin

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*Romans 3:10-24 NRSV*

Of all our Lenten texts, this one might be the most appropriate for the season. “There is no one righteous, not even one” (v. 10). This text is a reminder of a world that is saturated in sin and death. It is a lament of despair at the ways of our world, a lament at forgetting God, a lament at violence, a lament at seeming hopelessness. After all, who could clean up this great mess? Who could put this brokenness back together?

We often want to answer, “We will, if we just work hard enough!” So we create rules, guidelines, and systems, and we fill our calendars. We work and strive, yet the world still seems broken and lost. We aren’t unlike the original hearers of this text, people who depended on the law, to create the boundaries of life, to direct them toward God and away from death. We too seek the laws that will save us, the guidelines that will rein us in and direct us toward life. Although boundaries are good and important, and doing the work we are called to is great, if we *only* depend on those things, we will still be left wanting.

We are reminded in this season of Lent, with our fasting, with our moments set aside to do the work we are called to, that we still need a Savior, and we still need grace.

The law was given to the Israelites to guide their relationship with God. Jewish law (Torah) often gets a bad reputation, but the heart of the law was Deuteronomy 6:5: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” This text, known as the *Shema*, was the cornerstone in understanding the entire law. It was so important that they were told to write it on the doorframes of their homes, recite it often, and impress it upon their children. Love of God was supposed to be what they oriented their lives around.

Many of the Torah laws seem strange in our world today, but they made sense in context. For example, in an era before much (or anything) was known about germs, it made sense to avoid pork because it can carry numerous diseases when it is not cooked thoroughly. Laws about isolation from the community during illness and ritual cleansing following recovery also make sense when we consider that the people did not have our modern understanding of contagious disease. The laws were boundaries that protected God’s people and promoted health and well-being.

Although the law itself was a good thing, the way it was applied eventually became a stumbling block. Instead of hinging on love, it became a plumbline to judge others’ commitment to God. It turned into something that had nothing to do with the state of the heart, but only people’s ability to follow each and every individual rule precisely according to those who interpreted the law (Pharisees, Sadducees).

Ultimately, it became a way to keep people out of the temple and separate from God Even though the law was meant to hinge on love, it was still not totally perfect because it excluded women or was harsher with them than with men, and it also was not entirely welcoming toward people who weren’t born into the faith, but wanted to be in community with the Israelites. Furthermore, the inadequacies of the law were not meant to indicate the inadequacy of God but to illustrate for the people how greatly they still needed God’s grace. No matter how good someone was at keeping the law, it was impossible to be flawless.

And what is the difference between Jews and Gentiles? In Romans 3, Paul is addressing the error that Jewish Christians were making in claiming superiority over gentile Christians because Jewish Christians still lived under the law, while gentile Christians did not. Paul’s goal is to point out that none of them are better than any of the others. Jewish heritage did not make people *more* favored by God than not having Jewish heritage.

The early church became a unique space in the Greco-Roman world because it was inclusive in many new or unusual ways. Paul enumerated these ways in Galatians 3:28, 21 impressing upon them that their faith in Christ not only united them but also made them equal to one another. There were, of course, guidelines for being part of early churches, due to persecution, but these guidelines were centered on belief in and faithfulness to Christ not on heritage, race, gender, background, age, economic status, or any other social hierarchy factor. The church was to be *one* in Christ Jesus.

We find Righteousness through Faith (and Grace) We all fall short! If the law is the standard, there is no possible way to fulfill it completely and flawlessly. Certainly, there are advances in culture, science, medicine, and other forms of knowledge and understanding that render some of the laws we find in the Old Testament to be irrelevant to our lives today: things like wearing clothes made of multiple kinds of fibers, mixing meat and dairy, and eating shellfish or pork.

But there are plenty of laws that *are* still relevant to our lives today, laws that we still struggle to keep. Look at the Ten Commandments alone! Sure, maybe it seems easy not to murder, but many of us have struggled at one time or another with idolatry, lying, keeping the Sabbath, honoring our parents, coveting the possessions of others … The reality is, it’s impossible to dot every i and cross every t, and it’s also an incredible amount of pressure. Not only that, but not everyone starts at the same place. Some people grow up knowing the law while others are introduced to it for the first time as adults.

The law itself assumes people will fall short of it, the law provides for that eventuality with the sacrifice rituals. Sacrifices were an acknowledgment of the ways humanity fell short, and offered a way to atone for sin. In Romans 3, Paul quotes Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, and various Psalms this demonstrates the ways that humans can fall short of God’s will and therefore sin. Verses 11–12: Nobody can seek God apart from grace. Verses 13–14: We sin with our speech. Verses 15–17: We resort to violence because we do not know how to live peacefully with one another.

Paul’s point is that we all sin, so we all need grace. We cannot work or earn our way out of sin because we will always fall short. We need grace! Lucky for us, God has revealed God’s character to us through the Person of Jesus, which means the law is no longer what points us to God because Jesus points and connects us to God. Our faith in Jesus is what makes us righteous, rather than our adherence to the law.

Our lives are transformed because of grace. We cannot work our way to righteousness, but we can be made righteous through faith in Jesus. This should impact the way we live our lives because we no longer live to *earn* God’s favor but know that the driving force is grace through Christ.

There is a certain amount of freedom in knowing we can’t earn the love and grace of God but that it’s given freely without our deserving it. There is also freedom when we can admit we have sinned but can now live a different way because of Jesus.

This text dwells in the reality of sin, but ultimately it is a text of profound love. God loved us so much that God made a way for us to be in relationship with God through Jesus. This way did not include the burden of following the letter of the law but extended grace to us instead.

Grace made a way for us to connect with God not based on our righteousness but on the righteousness of Jesus, which is why in this season we can confront our sin. We can confront our mistakes, our humanness, and our pain because we know there is a story of grace that is extended to us if we are willing to receive it.