



Sermon – December 10, 2017

Verses Covered This Week

Romans 3:21 - 26

Good morning. Greetings from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky where I have the great privilege of teaching. It's one of the six seminaries that you support through your Southern Baptist giving through the cooperative program. We're so thankful for your generosity. We're thankful that we have; a faculty like us have the privilege of training pastors and ministers and all kinds of Christians for various vocations to go to the nations to make disciples. So they might see the Son lifted up and come to Him through repenting of their sins and believing in Him. We're so thankful that you are a church that helps make that happen. So thank you.

On a more personal note, I want to thank you as Central Baptist Church for your investment into me. As was said before, I was here, I served as one of the college ministers from 2001 to 2004. But before that, my wife and I were students, we weren't married at the time when we, of course, met. But we were students here from '95 to '99. And honestly, that's right, Class of '99. Yeah, that means I'm getting older. I came here, not to go to school originally, I came here because I was hopeless. My father had just died and I was not living a good life. I was living in a life of sin and I was racing cars and I moved here to kind of get out of the trouble I was getting into in Houston. And moved up to be with my sister and her husband who were students here at Texas A&M. I was hopeless. I was living a life that was not pleasing to God. And I was living a life that was just in despair. I was trying to find my hope and my joy in the things of this world and every one of those things failed me. And so I started coming to church with my sister and brother-in-law and after about a year of sitting under the preaching of the word by Pastor Chris and the teaching of Kevin Ueckert, the College Pastor at the time, the Lord opened my eyes to the glory and the beauty of Christ and what He had done for a sinner like me through His own life and death and resurrection. So I was saved through the ministry of this church.

Pastor Chris invested in me. I don't know how many breakfasts we had at Denny's. I don't know if he still takes people there. But we went to many breakfasts there at Denny's. And I was invested in by Kevin Ueckert and invested in by many families. I mean, without blinking, I could probably name 10 families who were so impactful to me as a young college student trying to find his way and stumbled as a new Christian. And so I'm so thankful for you as a church because my life would not be the same as it is now if it were not for your faithful investment into me. Not only

was I saved here, I was called to ministry here. Not only was I called to ministry here, I met my wife here. Actually the first time I saw my wife, she was playing in the orchestra and my roommate actually had noticed her first and quickly drew my eye's attention to her and within just a couple of weeks, I was confident that she was going to be my wife. However, she did not know that nor did I tell her that because that would have been spooky. So guys, take notes, don't go tell a girl that God's called you to marry her. She would run away, and she should. But I met my wife here. We got married here. We did our premarital counseling here under the pastors and with families in this church. And not only that was I called to ministry, and met my wife, and married her here, Pastor Chris, for whatever reason, gave this guy a chance to serve in full time ministry from 2001 to 2004. And those years have been deeply formative in my life. So I'm so thankful for you and your investment into me.

Please turn in your Bibles to Romans 3. We'll be in verses 21 through 26 this morning. You don't have to raise your hand, but is anyone in here, did you come in here feeling tired, feeling weary? Anyone in here, again don't raise your hand, maybe are just getting over a sickness and you're trying to kind of recoup and gain your strength. Or maybe you're currently sick, don't raise your hand because people around you would like part like the Red Sea because they don't want to get your germs. Anyone in here have deadlines this week? I don't know, maybe finals going on. I heard a rumor. Or maybe you have a work deadline that's coming up. Or maybe, maybe you're experiencing a particular difficulty or challenge with one of your children. We all come in here with various struggles. And I would suspect those are just general struggles that are common to all of us. I would suspect that there are deeper struggles amongst a group like this. Maybe you're just trying to put one foot in front of the other because you've just been spiritually attacked. You're struggling to fight that besetting sin and temptation that you've fallen to for the thousandth time and you're weary. We're entering the Christmas season and many of us put our hopes in Christmas season for the wrong reason. We want the Christmas season to meet our deepest needs. Maybe we look to a gift that will satisfy us. Maybe we, maybe we look to a vacation to kind of give us some escape from our present circumstances. Maybe you're discouraged. You just kind of want a break from, from work, and a break from school and a break from the relationships you're in. I don't know what goes on in here. We're all looking for something or someone to fill our deepest desires. And the thing we must understand this morning, and you hear this every week, is that only God can do that. Augustine, one of the early church fathers, says that as he's sharing his testimony through his confessions, he says, "Our hearts are restless until they find rest in You." That escape, that relationship, that vacation, that period of wellness, of health, that's not going to bring you ultimate satisfaction and rest. Only Jesus will bring you rest. Only God can provide what we most need and He has provided what we most need in the gospel of His Son. So that will be our focus this morning.

Now many of us take for granted or misunderstand this truth. Not just by people who don't go to church or haven't grown up in church or whatever else, but also for us who have grown up in church. Maybe who think that we are relatively good. I mean, after all we haven't murdered anyone this week or this year. Maybe our parents are Christians and we've gone to church our whole lives and so we think, "Well of course God will accept me. What else do I have to do?" You can even go to a gospel preaching church like this one and then say, "But surely God has favor on me." The danger is that the gospel can become so commonplace that it gets pushed to the margins. The gospel can become so commonplace, especially in a season like this. It can become

so common that it can be pushed to the margins of our lives. We can rely on other things. For those of you in the middle of finals, here's a fill in the blank question. What first comes into your mind to complete this sentence? God accepts me because of: what? You fill in the blank. God accepts me because of: what? It's subtle. Maybe, here's just recount a good day. You wake up in the morning, 6 AM, you don't even have to wake up to your alarm. Your body wakes you up and you feel refreshed. You don't even need coffee to open your eyes. You're like bright eyed. You're feeling good. You have these desires to go and spend time and dig down in God's word. And God meets with you through His word which He always does. And you go about your day. You get ready and you go to work or you go to school or you're in the grocery line and someone comes up to you and just says, "Look, I've noticed something different about you. What do you have that I don't have?" That's how I became a Christian, by the way, here. I went to somebody here and said, "What do you have that I don't have?" And they shared the gospel with me. And you share the gospel with them and they say, "Well what must I do to be saved?" And you just share the gospel. And right then and there that person is delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son. And you're feeling great. You go home, you engage with your family, they're not annoying to you, you're actually thankful for them. You have great conversations. You put your kids down at night. You have great conversation with your roommate, your parents. When you lay your head on your pillow, what is God's posture towards you? How do you feel God's stance towards you is? Well God looks favorable on me. Look at my day.

On the other hand, let's recount a different kind of day. You wake up, alarm wakes you up, you hit the snooze like 27 times, you don't want to wake up, you stay in bed because it's snowed and it's cold out there. But you have to get up and your roommate or your parents, I know you can't imagine this, or your friend is annoying to you, you don't want to talk to them. You see a person in the grocery store or another person to ask you the same question. "I've noticed something different about you." Then you're just like, "Come to church with me on Sunday and you'll hear something." In other words, I don't want to talk to you. I don't have time. I don't feel like it. You did spend time with the Lord that day and you're impatient, quick to anger, and you lay your head on that pillow and you think, "How does God feel about me today? Is He pleased with me?" In each of these answers, in each of these scenarios, our performance is the basis for God's favor or non-favor towards us. And we must understand that what we do is never the basis of God's acceptance and favor towards us or the opposite. The only basis for God's acceptance and pleasure and favor towards you, is what Christ has done for you in your place. And now, by faith, you are united to Him so that His righteousness is deposited into your bank account. And so whether you have a good day or a bad day, God's stance towards you is; you are in His Son and He loves you.

So we're going to focus on the gospel this morning. Martin Luther once was asked by one of his congregants, why do you preach the same gospel day in and day out? Every single day you preach the same thing. And Martin Luther responded, "Because we need to hear it every day." We never move beyond the gospel. The gospel's not merely the front door that we enter into other deeper things. The gospel is the Christian life. The same gospel that saves us initially is the same gospel that sustains us to the end. So let's read Romans chapter 3, verses 21 through 26. I have two points. I know it's a bad Baptist sermon; it's not three points, they're not alliterated, but forgive me. Two points. Number one: the bad news, verses 21 to 23. Second point: the good news, verses 24 to 26. Romans chapter 3, verse 21:

²¹But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – ²²that is the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that's in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom 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. ²⁶It was to show His righteousness at the present time, so that He might be just and the justifier, maybe better put, the just justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Verse 21 begins by saying that now the righteousness of God has been made known. It has been revealed. Why is this manifestation of revelation important? Well Romans 3:23 tells us. Because, or for, all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. Now this verse encapsulates what has been said from verses chapter 1:18 through 3:20 in which Paul shows that all people, in his context Jews and Gentiles, in our context, all of us, are sinners. He begins by saying that the wrath of God has been revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and the righteousness of men. That though we have the knowledge of God planted in us through His created order, through His divine attributes that are made known in nature, like His divine power and eternity. The problem is we suppress that truth by our unrighteousness. We worship created things instead of the Creator. We're sinners. He goes on to make a point that though Jews had received the mosaic law, they received the commands of God, they received the Word of God, the problem was they couldn't keep God's word perfectly. God's standard for entering into His presence is perfection because He is perfectly holy. And the Jews couldn't do it. So what do the Gentiles who don't have His word? Paul answers that question too. Even though the Gentiles don't have the law, they don't have God's commands, they don't have God's word, they have God's word written in their hearts by way of their conscience. That inner sense of right and wrong that all of us have. God has put it there. And when we sin, what happens is our sin, our conscience either excuses us or, Eve made me do it. The woman You gave me, God, that's not my fault. The devil made me do it. It excuses us or it accuses us. We know we've sinned, but we feel, we do something to appease that feeling of guilt. And he ends with Romans 3:20; that by the works of the law, that is, by what the law requires, namely our obedience, no one will be justified, will be declared right, will be accepted in His sight. Because through the law comes the knowledge of sin. Now maybe you're here and think, "What does that have to do with me?" Paul's talking to Jews and Gentiles. I don't worship four footed creatures. Paul's point is that every person is a sinner.

What does something look like in our context? Maybe you feel depressed or discouraged so you look for food or you look for a relationship to, to comfort you, to give you some satisfaction. Maybe you're jealous over another guy or girl that got the one you wanted. Maybe you're quick to criticize because it makes you feel better about yourself. Maybe you wanted that A in the class or that work project that somebody else got. And your heart brings some bitterness towards that person. Maybe you look for ways to criticize that mom who seems to have everything together. Her marriage is perfect. Her kids are perfect. They come into church and they sit with their hands folded against their laps and they're all dressed up in little bowties and dresses and they all coordinate. And she baked cookies for her Sunday school class and she even has time to write a blog or a book about it. And you're just trying to put one foot in front of the other. You're just

trying to make it. You're just trying to make sure your kids have shoes when they come into church. Maybe you're entertaining unloving thoughts toward another person. Maybe you manipulate people and treat them as objects to get what you want instead of as subjects to be treated with honor and dignity and respect because they're made in God's image. You treat them as means to get what you want. Maybe you find yourself entertaining impure glances or flirting with others for excitement. Maybe you're quick to anger. I don't know. Ask your wife. Ask your husband. Ask your children. Ask your parents. Ask your roommate. Maybe you've gotten so used to lying that you don't know what the truth is anymore. Maybe you're here thinking, "I'm very aware of my sin. I'm very aware of my weakness. Which much mean that I'm humble." At that point you've pridefully sinned. Now you may be asking, "Why do you spend so much time on the bad news? Pastor Chris, never invite this guy again. He's so negative. What a 'Debbie Downer'." Well I'm trying to encapsulate for us to feel what Paul has just unpacked over the last 64 verses. Each of us is a sinner before a holy God. And we won't appreciate the Good News if we don't know the bad. Imagine going to the dentist for your annual teeth cleaning and the dentist comes out and says, "We found a cure for cancer!" What do you think your response would be? "Big deal. I just came in for a teeth cleaning." I don't have cancer. Why is that good news to me? Maybe you're at the doctor for your annual checkup in which you've just been diagnosed the previous year with stage 4 cancer with no hope for a cure. And the doctor comes into the room and says, "We found a cure for your cancer." What do you think your response would be? Joy! Relief! The bad news is that each one of us is separated from a holy God and without hope. But a solution has been provided for us in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Each one of us in this room has fallen short of God's glorious character. But the good news is He's provided a way for us to be saved from our sin and His wrath. Let's read verses 21 and 22 again.

[²¹But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – ²²that is the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.](#)

What does Paul mean by the righteousness of God? Well he just spent 64 verses talking about God's judging righteousness in which we are all rightly, justly condemned before Him. And we stand before a holy judge condemned. But now in this present era, because Christ has come, there's a different kind of righteousness that's being manifested. And that righteousness is God's saving righteousness through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Imagine being wrongfully imprisoned and declared guilty for a crime you didn't commit. Recently my wife watched, my wife and I, watched a documentary on a guy named Kalief Browder who was wrongfully imprisoned as a 15/16 year old for a crime that he didn't commit and was put in Rikers Island for a number of years. He was subjected to an incredible abuse, mistreatment, he was put in isolation for I think it was 3 – 6 times the normal amount for a human being. As a teenager, inhumane treatment, isolation. When given the chance to plead guilty to lessen his verdict for stealing a backpack from another kid, he didn't do it. He still, his stance was "I didn't commit the crime." After three years appealing to the justice system, they finally let him out. Imagine how he felt. Free! Vindicated. Friends you and I are not wrongfully accused. God's verdict is in accordance with the facts. Each of us has sinned against Him. We stand before Him guilty, but God demonstrated His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for

us. That's the good news of the gospel. And this is the good news of verses 24 through 26; our second point.

God has manifested this saving righteousness even though the Law and the Prophets bore witness to it, we have all these saving promises of God, that through you, Eve, will come an offspring who will crush the head of the serpent. From you, Abraham, will come an offspring who will bring blessing to all the families of the earth. That promise is carried through to Isaac and Jacob and Judah and Israel and David and Solomon. All these promises. When we get to the prophets and servants coming, and the servant will bring the good news of salvation. He will save God's people from their enemies. Not just from Assyria and Babylon and the Medo-Persians and the Greeks and the Romans, He will save them from their sins. The Law and the Prophets bore witness to this saving righteousness. The problem was they couldn't earn it. God had to do it. And that's exactly what He did by sending His Son. Verse 24 says that we are justified. That is, we are declared right. We go from guilty to innocent. From condemned to free by His grace as a gift through the redemption of His Son Christ Jesus. To be redeemed, to be free, or to be liberated. What was the price? Paul tells us. By His blood. Christ's own blood was the payment for our sin. He paid the debt that we owed with His own life. He died, not for His own sin, but for yours and for mine so that through trusting Him we can be freed. We can be liberated.

But then Paul launches into what seems to be a problem that's posed in this statement. How in the world can God say to guilty sinners, "You're innocent." Think about Proverbs 17:15 for a second. That the one who declares righteous, the guilty, or who condemns the innocent; both alike are an abomination to the Lord. The One who justifies the ungodly, or the One who condemns the innocent; both alike are an abomination to the Lord. And yet here we see that God justifies the ungodly. How in the world can God do that? Imagine a judge letting a guilty murderer go free. The court knows he did it. The murderer knows he did it. And the judge just says, "I'm having a good day. Go free." How can God just sweep David's sin under the rug? The king after God's own heart who committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband to cover it up. How can God just say, "Your sins are forgiven." We would be in outrage if a Supreme Court justice did that. Yet Romans tells us that God justifies the ungodly. How in the world can He do that? Verses 25 and 26 give us the answer. Because God put Christ Jesus forward as a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith. This was to show or demonstrate God's righteousness because in His divine forbearance, he passed over previous sins. This word propitiation is an important word. It's used in the Old Testament to refer to the mercy seat in the temple. The place where atonement or sacrifice was made so that God's wrath could be turned away against the sin of the people. Their sins were wiped away, God's wrath towards sin, towards sinful people, is appeased. The problem was those sacrifices were insufficient. Hebrews tells us that had to be done year after year after year. Why? Because those were finite created sacrifices. They couldn't take away God's wrath. But Jesus came. God the Son became like us, shared with us in our humanity, took on to Himself our flesh and blood so that He might deliver us from the devil and might destroy the works of the devil, Hebrews 2 tells us. Today's it's often asked how God can punish sin and send those to hell who don't believe in Him. I mean after all, doesn't love win? Paul's question is different, "How can God be so patient?" How can God be so patient towards me? Sinning against Him for 20 years. How can God be so patient towards you? Romans 2 tells us and 3 tells us that it's God's kindness and patience that is meant to lead us to a repentance. Even now God is patient toward you and towards me, towards sinners so they can come to faith in Christ. And that's why

we proclaim it. If you're here this morning and you have not put your trust in Jesus, He's the only one that can appease God's wrath towards you. So put your trust in Him. Be freed.

When we understand and feel the weight that we deserve God's punishment because of our guilt, but we've received the gift of righteousness before Him, we respond in three ways. Number one: we respond in praise. When we realize and feel that God has poured out His grace on us, entirely apart from our works. His grace is stunning and amazing to us. We're filled with praise and thankfulness. How will others see your faith in Christ? How will you witness to others, to your children, to your friends, to your co-workers? By being happy in God. And that comes by being justified by God in Christ. If you are happy in God, and not only happy in your circumstances, or because you get what you want, people around you will notice. True joy can't be hidden and it's contagious. Let me add that such joy expresses itself differently. You're not a happy, clappy person all the time. Maybe you are. Don't equate joy with personality. A more outgoing person's going to express joy more outwardly. A more introverted, kind of introverted person will express joy more inwardly. But the joy I'm talking about isn't natural to us. It comes from the gospel. It comes from being forgiven in Christ. We can fall back into thinking that what we do merits God's favor easily. It's second-nature to feel like we have to earn something. Everything we do in life is based on works; our school, I tell my students all the time, "You're saved by grace, you're graded by your works." I don't grade by grace. So do the work. Everything we do is based on works; our school, our work, oftentimes our relationships. People are always evaluating us. Do we measure up? But the Christian life is not the Nike slogan: just do it. The Christian life is; it's been done. So trust in who did it. Rest in Christ alone who accomplished, on your behalf, what you couldn't do so that you can have access to God.

Secondly, we respond to this by being assured, a confidently assured. If we put our trust in Christ and our resting alone in what He has done for us, we feel a depths of confidence in going to Him. We don't have to wonder if we've done enough to be saved. We don't have to wonder if our good works outweigh our bad works. Our job isn't to work for God, but to believe in God. God doesn't ask us to achieve, but to believe. He doesn't ask us to work, but to receive. And to rest in His finished work in Christ. A big question in the Old Testament is how do we have access to God? A priest got access to the Holy of Holies, but in a terrifying way as he went to make sacrifices. I've got to make a confession. I like nice cars, but the problem is I hate buying them because I have insufficient resources. So a couple of years ago when it came time to replace my wife's car, I kind of overshopped a little bit and bought a nicer car than probably what, what we could afford. But I'm committed not to drive a mini-van so it worked out. No offense to mini-vans. I had a terrible experience buying this car. I mean bargaining with the guy was a joke because I mean he, I knew my number and he had to come down to it because we couldn't afford it otherwise. And it was terrifying because I didn't have the resources. But last year, I get a call from a generous family member saying, "I want to go buy you a car. Pick out whatever you want." I was like, "Come again?" And so I went and picked out a 2017 Mustang GT Premium, 6-speed, 435 horsepower, and I walked up to that salesman like I didn't have a care in the world. Why? Because I had the resources. And those resources weren't my resources. They were the resources of another friends. You and I have access to God, not based on our resources, but based on the resources of what Christ has done for us. People pay thousands of dollars to have access to a celebrity. We have free access to a holy God who created us. That in his right hand are the fullness of joy forevermore. So go to Him.

Lastly, we respond to this truth in loving others. When we live with joy, praise, assurance because of what God's done for us in Christ, it frees us to love. An example of how this love frees us is, I'll be quick, an example from the life of Ulysses S. Grant, who was a former Civil War general who became president. His wife, Julia, had crossed eyes. And as Ulysses Grant became more popular and famous and kind of was ascending to the presidency, she thought, "This is going to be a big problem. I'm deficient." She began to worry about what her eyes looked like. What would people think? She tried to get surgery, but the doctor told her it wouldn't work. Her eyes were too bad. Now I'm quoting from one of his biographers. When Grant found out his wife was trying to change her eyes, he asked why on earth she would consider a thing? She explained her reasoning saying, "Why, you are getting to be such a great man, and I am such a little wife, plain little wife. I thought if my eyes were as others, I might not be so very, very plain." Ulysses, who knows. Grant was horrified and he said, "Did I not see you and fall in love with you with these same eyes? I like them just as they are, and now, remember, you are not to interfere with them. They are mine, and let me tell you, Mrs. Grant, you had better not make any experiments, as I might not like you half so well with any other eyes." Imagine the freedom that his wife felt when she heard those loving words from her husband. Imagine how freed she was to live as his wife. Grants love as a husband points to a greater love; the love of Christ which accepts us as we are and changes us, cleanses us from our sins and frees us to love others out of the abundance because we're loved perfectly in Christ. When we trust God we depend on Him for what we most need because He's provided what we most need. And our lives are marked by love. We don't love so that God will love us. We love because God has loved us in Christ.

I'm deeply grateful to God for your example of love towards me and my wife. I'm a recipient of it. My life is forever changed because of it. Let me just encourage you. Don't grow weary in doing good. Don't grow weary in loving others. Having an international student or student from America in your home. Meeting with another brother or sister in Christ who's struggling over coffee. You may never see or hear the impact you're making. But trust me, from my own life, you are making an impact because God has set you free to love others and I'm a recipient of it.

The Cologne Cathedral, Germany, is the most visited landmark. At over five stories, it's the tallest twin-spired church in Europe. Construction began in the 1200's, resumed in the 1400's, and was completed in the 1800's. 600 years, if you're an architect in here, that's crazy to build this cathedral. Now imagine with me for a second. You're the guy in 1248 when construction began, you have a shovel and you're beginning to dig the foundation, just you and your shovel. And you have no idea what this structure would become 600 years later. Central Baptist Church, God is doing much more than filling a building on Sundays and Wednesdays. As God, in His grace forgives and accepts us in Christ, it also changes us to be more like Him and frees us to love and to obey out of hearts that have been accepted by Him and Christ and what He's done for us. Our lives are changed and we love, 1 John says, because He first loved us. So rest in this gospel, praise God for His work in Christ, be compelled to love others because you've been loved perfectly by God and Christ.

Let's pray.