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**God's Righteousness – and Ours**

**Romans 10.1-4**

**Series: The Pure Gospel**

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**The Village Church**

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I. Introduction

- A. To borrow an illustration adapted from James Montgomery Boice, imagine with me a war time scenario
- B. A platoon of American soldiers has been captured by the German army during WWII
  - 1. They are sent to a POW camp
    - a. And to avoid getting into the gutter of POW conditions in that great war, you might want to imagine something more along the lines of Hogan's Heroes
    - b. Anyway, this particular platoon in this particular camp are granted some relative degree of autonomy within the usual strictures of being prisoners
  - 2. At some point, a care package has arrived from some family members who have been notified of the incarceration of their son
    - a. And in that package was a game of Monopoly
    - b. That iconic game, based on the real estate of Atlantic City, created during the Great Depression
    - c. In which properties were bought and sold, and wealth was transferred, until those who were both fortunate enough and wise enough to acquire more and more wealth, eventually would win the game
  - 3. These soldiers were delighted to have received the game, but not because they wanted to play the game
    - a. No – they were delighted because of the money that was included in the game
  - 4. You all know about Monopoly money
    - a. There were various denominations which were differentiated by a variety of colors
    - b. They were orange, beige, blue, green, yellow, pink and white
    - c. They ranged from \$500 all the way to \$1
  - 5. And these soldiers had no intention of actually playing the game
    - a. No – they developed a camp economy using the Monopoly money as currency
    - b. So cigarettes cost a certain amount, a candy bar something else
    - c. You could pay somebody else to do your latrine duty

- d. Or whatever
  - e. The system worked wonderfully
- C. Now as you all know, in any given society there is always a born capitalist
  - 1. People who could really turn a dime into a dollar
    - a. And who could manage his wealth in such a way as to accumulate greater than average wealth
  - 2. And in this camp, there was just such a soldier
    - a. He had managed to generate a great deal of wealth in the camp economy
    - b. He worked hard at it, and was very successful
- D. Well, the war ended and the platoon was freed from their captivity
  - 1. They all returned back to the states
  - 2. And our capitalist returned to his home town, say Baltimore, Maryland (could have been anywhere)
  - 3. And the first thing he did was go to his local bank
  - 4. He goes up to the teller and says he'd like to open an account
    - a. She asked him how much he'd like to deposit
    - b. He said he had \$1,534,632 to deposit – all in cash
  - 5. The teller, of course, was very excited – she had never had a customer like that before
    - a. So she asked him to present the cash to her
    - b. And he gave here the 1.5 million he'd managed to accumulate – in Monopoly money
  - 6. In addition to calling her manager, she also called security
- E. Monopoly money worked just fine in the POW camp
  - 1. But it was worthless in the American economic system
- F. Our text this morning speaks of knowledge and ignorance
  - 1. It concerns how in Paul's day, the Jewish people has largely rejected Jesus as the Messiah
    - a. And Paul seeks to explain why that has happened
  - 2. And the thing about which the Jewish people were ignorant was **righteousness**
- G. The word "righteousness" is **dikaioisune (Gk)**
  - 1. It occurs three times in two verses, and is implicit in the text a fourth time
- H. **Romans 10:2-4 (ESV)** —
  - 1. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.
  - 2. 3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God,
  - 3. and seeking to establish their own,
  - 4. they did not submit to God's righteousness.
  - 5. 4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.
- I. Two qualities are represented in this text by the same word
  - 1. There is **God's righteousness**
  - 2. And there is **Our righteousness**

3. And even though the same word is used, they are very different indeed
- J. Both qualities are useful in their own domains
  1. Human righteousness carries the notion of how we act rightly with regard to our fellow humans
    - a. And is useful in managing a society in which the general welfare might prevail
    - b. And certainly in our world some sense of righteousness is necessary to establish a moral consensus
    - c. Governing personal, property, and business relationships among other things
  2. We may debate exactly what constitutes what is right in our social world
    - a. But there is no doubt that everyone of sound mind has some sense that certain actions are right and others are not
- K. But God's righteousness is an entirely different matter
  1. God's righteousness has to do with right standing before God
    - a. And God alone is truly righteous
    - b. In fact, God's righteousness is inseparably related to His holiness
    - c. His holiness is that which identifies Him as other than us
  2. So, as valuable as our righteousness might be in our fractured attempts to manage a just society
    - a. Our righteousness might as well be Monopoly money
  3. To try to use our righteousness to settle accounts with God...
    - a. Well, let's just say that the cosmic teller would just laugh
    - b. And then He would call security!
- L. We are all ignorant about many things
  1. Even the most brilliant among us may be extraordinarily knowledgeable about their areas of expertise, but even they are still ignorant about many other things
  2. But if you are ignorant about the righteousness of God, the results can be catastrophic and eternal
- M. But let's not get ahead of ourselves
  1. Let's back up and set the stage for this momentous of all issues and review where Paul has taken us up to this point

## II. Sovereignty and Responsibility

- A. Recall that Romans 10 comes right after Romans 9!
  1. And we found that Romans 9 is a particularly challenging chapter in this greatest of all books about the gospel of Jesus Christ
- B. Romans 9 put the sovereignty of God in the foreground
  1. And in no uncertain terms proclaimed God's role in individual salvation
- C. Much of Romans 9 was about the doctrine of election
  1. About God's choice of those who would receive the grace of salvation
- D. Remember that it was the child of the promise, Isaac, who was chosen over Ishmael in Abraham and Sarah's household (**Romans 9.9**)
  1. The miraculous child of the promise

- E. And remember the choice of Jacob over Esau (**Romans 9.10-12**)
  - 1. Who, as twins in the womb together, before they were born, and before they had done anything good or bad
    - a. It was said that the older would serve the younger
    - b. And thus Jacob the younger was chosen over Esau
  - 2. Paul even quotes the Malachi prophesy: Jacob I loved and Esau I hated
    - a. Wow...
- F. And Paul anticipates the objection we all have felt viscerally, but he doubles down and quotes Moses
  - 1. "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." (**Romans 9.15; Exodus 33.19**)
  - 2. And then Paul summarizes, "So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy." (**Romans 9.16**)
- G. Then he goes on to speak of the hardening of Pharaoh and brings in the doctrine of reprobation into play
  - 1. And uses the metaphor of the potter and the clay – which is prominent in the OT – to illustrate God's prerogative to make some for honorable use and others for dishonorable use (**Romans 9.21**)
- H. Oh man, is that tough to swallow!
  - 1. But it's there, plain as day
  - 2. So we wonder, "Ok, God, but where does human responsibility come into play?"
- I. Well, we're already starting to see it
  - 1. Last week we concluded our study of Romans 9
    - a. But actually the end of Romans 9 begins a new segment of Romans in which human responsibility is in the foreground
  - 2. Paul, in his explanation of why Gentiles have been favorable toward the gospel of Christ and the Jews have not, places the responsibility squarely, not on God who is sovereign, but on human beings – Gentile and Jew respectively
    - a. And that shift in emphasis carries us into chapter 10
- J. **Romans 9:30–32** (ESV) —
  - 1. 30 What shall we say, then?
  - 2. That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith;
  - 3. 31 but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law.
  - 4. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone...
- K. So, while Romans 9 is clear about the ultimate issue regarding salvation involves God's sovereign choice
  - 1. Nevertheless, that does not mean humans do not have agency in this decision
  - 2. Gentiles who are saved received that salvation because they received the message by faith

3. Jews, on the other hand, stumbled because they did not pursue righteousness by faith but as if it were by works
4. So, we human beings are responsible for how we respond to Jesus Christ
- L. Now, if you can't figure out how human beings are responsible for their decisions regarding salvation when God is sovereign over salvation, let me offer you a brief word of explanation
  1. You're not God!
  2. You may be brilliant
    - a. You may have pondered the philosophical implications of God's sovereignty and human responsibility
    - b. You may have read all the books that have emphasized one or the other positions
    - c. And you may think you've got it figured out
  3. But your brilliant mind is a mere pea-brain compared to the mind of God
  4. And Paul doesn't have any trouble proclaiming in no uncertain terms the sovereignty of God in salvation
    - a. And he also doesn't mince any words with respect to human responsibility either – which he does powerfully in Chapter 10
  5. And if you can't figure out how the two truths can be fully embraced together
    - a. Maybe the problem is you're not so smart after all!
- M. I think it's fascinating, by the way, that in Romans – as in many places in the NT – that the places that speaks most powerfully about the sovereignty of God is right next to the places that speak about the responsibility of human beings
  1. That Romans 9 comes right before Romans 10

### III. Saving Prayer

- A. Now, having said all of that, how are we supposed to respond when
  1. God is sovereign in salvation
  2. Human beings have made their own bad decision about Jesus Christ
    - a. That is, they've made their own bed
- B. How about this?
  1. How about we pray for people?
    - a. That's right – let's pray for people
- C. Now the text that I read from Romans 10 a few moments ago started with v. 2
  1. I did not start with v. 1
    - a. So let's see what v. 1 says
  2. Romans 10:1 (ESV) —
    - a. 1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.
- D. There are some who would say, "Since God is sovereign, and the end is determined, why pray?"
  1. Well, that didn't stop Paul, did it?
  2. Others will say, "Well, these people have made their choice. They seem to be nowhere near coming to Christ. Why waste my time praying for them."

3. That didn't stop Paul either!
  - a. Maybe Paul knew that at one point in his life he was the last person anyone would expect to come to Jesus!
- E. No! We need to think completely differently about prayer for those who do not yet know Christ
  1. God is sovereign over salvation
    - a. He determines who is saved
    - b. But, not only does God determine who will be saved
    - c. He determines how they will be saved
    - d. And how they will be saved is you and your prayers!
  2. In theology the way we would express it is this:
    - a. God ordains both the ends and the means by which the ends are accomplished
  3. So, our sovereign God has determined that the way His people will be saved is through prayer and the preaching of the word!
    - a. Prayer is evident in this text
    - b. And preaching will be as we continue to explore Romans 10
- F. So look how Paul expresses this compulsion to pray
  1. "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they be saved." (**Romans 10.1**)
  2. Paul's prayer for his own Jewish kinsmen flows from his heart's desire
    - a. He wants more than anything that his Jewish kinsmen would know Jesus and be saved
    - b. It is what wakes him up at night
    - c. It is what occupies his thoughts every time he sees a Jewish friend who doesn't know Jesus
    - d. It is what he talks about with his brothers and sisters in Christ
  3. Remember how Romans 9 began
  4. **Romans 9:1–3** (ESV) —
    - a. 1 I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—
    - b. 2 that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.
    - c. 3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.
  5. Paul would be willing to be condemned to hell if it would mean the salvation of his kinsmen
    - a. Do you have that same concern for your family and friends who don't yet know Jesus?
  6. But Paul doesn't leave it at the level of his heart
    - a. He gives feet to his heart
    - b. He prays
    - c. He prays "to God for them"
  7. Maybe you have a hard time talking to friends and family about Jesus
    - a. Ok, I get it

- b. But how about talking to God about your friends and family!
    - c. You wouldn't have a problem with that, would you?
  - 8. One of the great principles of evangelism is that we should talk to God about our friends more than we talk to our friends about God!
  - 9. So it's Paul's heart's desire and prayer for them
    - a. Pray for what?
    - b. Prayer that they may be saved!
  - 10. There are many things we can, and often do, pray for for our friends and family
    - a. We pray for their health and the health and well being of their children
    - b. We pray that children grow and develop into responsible adults and good citizens
    - c. We pray that broken relationships would be healed
    - d. We pray that our friends and family would have good jobs
    - e. We're commanded in the scriptures to pray for our leaders, both church leaders and civil magistrates, for wisdom in governing their respective domains
  - 11. But more than anything else we must pray that they may be saved!
- G. Maybe you already do that
  - 1. But have you discovered the value of praying for your loved ones along with other people?
    - a. We have opportunities to do just that
    - b. Our Wednesday night prayer meeting has us praying for the salvation of many – some who are close to us, and some who are on the mission field
    - c. Our Tuesday afternoon womens' missions prayer group regularly prays for the salvation of loved ones
    - d. Why don't you join them?
  - 2. That's out of your comfort zone?
    - a. I understand
    - b. But I also understand that hell is also uncomfortable!
- H. God is sovereign
  - 1. Human beings are responsible agents
  - 2. Paul prays that they will be saved
    - a. Will you?

#### IV. Zeal and Knowledge

- A. Now Paul prays for his kinsmen that they be saved
  - 1. But he also puts flesh on those bones of prayer
    - a. He lays out the content of his praying based on what he knows about his Jewish friends
- B. Romans 10:2 (ESV) —
  - 1. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God,
  - 2. but not according to knowledge.

- C. You see, Paul has taken the time to understand something about those for whom he is praying
  - 1. He knows that many of his Jewish friends are serious about religion
    - a. Indeed, they are “zealous”
    - b. They have a zeal for God – a passion, in fact
  - 2. But it’s a misplaced zeal
    - a. They are passionate, but they are not knowledgeable, Paul says
- D. Now Paul can certainly relate
  - 1. He himself was in exactly the same state
    - a. He was zealous beyond his Jewish compatriots
  - 2. **Philippians 3:4–6** (ESV) —
    - a. 4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.
    - b. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:
    - c. 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews;
    - d. as to the law, a Pharisee;
    - e. 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church;
    - f. as to righteousness under the law, blameless.
  - 3. Paul was so zealous, he persecuted the church because he believed these people of the Way were diametrically opposed the Law of Moses
    - a. He stood by guarding the belongings of those who were murdering Stephen
    - b. He was dispatched to go to the surrounding area and arrest members of this supposed cult of the Way
  - 4. But he was ignorant!
    - a. His zeal was wasted energy
    - b. His actions were an attack against the God he sought he was serving
  - 5. He had a zeal without knowledge
- E. And it takes one to know one, as the saying goes
  - 1. He knew that zealous ignorance looks like for he was one!
  - 2. So when he prays for the salvation of his kinsmen, he prays that God would intervene in their zealous ignorance and save them!

## V. **Ignorance and Righteousness**

- A. Now, what were they ignorant about?
- B. **Romans 10:3** (ESV) —
  - 1. 3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God,
  - 2. and seeking to establish their own,
  - 3. they did not submit to God’s righteousness.
- C. So now we’re back to where we started!
  - 1. They were ignorant of God’s righteousness
    - a. And they were seeking to establish their own righteousness
  - 2. They were trying to open an account with God using Monopoly money!

- D. Now, you can be ignorant about a lot of things
  - 1. In fact, you can be ignorant about a lot of theological things
    - a. Indeed, ignorant about a lot of religious things
  - 2. And still get to heaven!
- E. But if you're ignorant about the righteousness of God....
- F. Because you see, the whole gospel story is about righteousness
  - 1. We humans lack righteousness
    - a. We suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Chapter 1)
    - b. There is no one righteous, no not one, Paul tells us in Chapter 3
  - 2. But the gospel is that the righteousness we need, we can't supply
    - a. Our human righteousness is not more valuable than Monopoly money
    - b. It's fool's gold
  - 3. We convince ourselves that we above average, better, perhaps, than most
    - a. But we're fools if we use our surrounding humans as the standard for what is needed to right standing with God
  - 4. But the gospel is that God has provided His righteousness
    - a. A divine righteousness
    - b. An alien righteousness – alien in the sense that it comes from another world – from heaven!
    - c. It is God's righteousness
    - d. It comes from His flawless character
    - e. It emanates from His holiness
    - f. It is by nature imperishable, undefiled, unfading
  - 5. And God, in His grace, has determined to give it to us!
    - a. Just give it to us as we believe in Jesus Christ
  - 6. And that's what God has been doing ever since the beginning
    - a. All the way back to Abraham
  - 7. **Genesis 15:6** (ESV) —
    - a. 6 And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.
- G. The gospel is that God has provided His righteousness – divine righteousness – through Jesus Christ for all who believe
  - 1. **Romans 1:17** (ESV) —
    - a. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written,
    - b. “The righteous shall live by faith.”
- H. No more counterfeit or play money
  - 1. This is the real things – God's righteousness
  - 2. Listen to how Paul describes his understanding of the difference between God's righteousness and ours
- I. **Philippians 3:4–11** (ESV) —
  - 1. 4 though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also.
  - 2. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:

3. 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;
  4. 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.
  5. 7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.
  6. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.
  7. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ
  8. 9 and be found in him, **not having a righteousness of my own** that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, **the righteousness from God** that depends on faith—
  9. 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,
  10. 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.
- J. Paul – finally – understood the righteousness of God
1. Someone once described Paul this way
    - a. In comparison with his compatriots, he fashioned himself as 100 Watt light bulb, and his various colleagues were like 75, or 60 Watt light bulbs
    - b. But when he encountered the risen Christ he discovered that Christ's righteousness was as bright as the sun
    - c. His 100 Watt light bulb was just so much inconsequential flickering in comparison with the holiness of God
    - d. His righteousness was completely invisible against the backdrop of the light of the holiness of God
  2. As zealous as Paul was in his ignorance, he was just playing with Monopoly money
- K. So, Paul's Jewish compatriots, "being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own [righteousness], they did not submit to God's righteousness."
1. Have you submitted to God's righteousness?
    - a. By casting yourself on the mercy of God in Christ?
    - b. By believing in, trusting in, Jesus Christ alone for God's righteousness?

## VI. Christ and Righteousness

- A. So how do we know what this righteousness looks like?
  1. Well, God sent us Jesus Christ
- B. **Romans 10:4** (ESV) —
  1. 4 For Christ is the end of the law
  2. for righteousness
  3. to everyone who believes.
- C. In other words, Jesus Christ is the very embodiment of the righteousness of God
  1. He alone lived a life you and I could never live

2. He alone died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin of unrighteousness
3. He alone rose from the dead to gain victory over the enemy of death
- D. And the way we receive the righteousness of God is not be our vain attempts at producing what we presume to be good works
  1. The way we receive the righteousness of God is by believing in Jesus Christ
- E. That is the gospel
  1. Oh, Paul's great desire is that his Jewish kinsmen would know Jesus
    - a. Not just because Jesus is a really good guy to know – He certainly is!
    - b. But because they need their ignorance to be cast on the dust-bin of history
    - c. And they need to know the true righteousness of God
    - d. And believing in Jesus, they would be saved
  2. That's Paul's gospel prayer
    - a. Is it your prayer also?
- F. Or more importantly, do you understand the righteousness of God?
  1. Do you know of your need for it?
  2. Or are you still playing with Monopoly money?
  3. Christ is the end of the law for righteousness
    - a. For everyone who believes
  4. Do you believe?