

WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR YOU

Romans 3:21-31

What has God done for you? If you're wondering, the video you saw is just a satire, it didn't happen, but for millions of people, the scenario that it tries to portray is the kind of thing that we're actually seeing in so many places today. Many people think that God hasn't done anything for them. They don't even think he exists. On the flip side, there are those who believe he exists or think he exists and when you ask them "What has God done for you?", most likely you'll get answers like "He gave me a wonderful family", "He gave me a satisfying job", "He helped me get through the darkest events in my life", "He healed me of cancer", "He helped me pass my exam", and so many positive-sounding declarations.

Today, I'd like to answer that question the right way. Because knowing the correct answer will determine your future destiny. Now, there's nothing wrong with the other answers that people may have, but they are fleeting, they're temporary, they won't make a difference in where you're going in the end. So, in today's message I'd like you to see how God cares for you now and in your future. He has done great things for you! That's why I've entitled this message "What God has Done for You".

We're continuing our series on "Power to Change". We're going through the Book of Romans verse by verse. And today, we're on the eighth part of the series and today, I'd like to focus on Romans 3:21-31. Please follow along as I read this passage to you.

Paul has been talking for three chapters, building a case logically step by step. The first section is the section on sin. He points out everybody is guilty, no man is

innocent, all have sinned so we all need to be saved. He's been building this case. We now come to a second major section of Romans.

v. 21 *"But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify."*

So, he starts the second major section with the words, *"but now"*. Thank God for those two words. This is a major turning point in the book of Romans. **This second section of Romans is about Salvation.**

In the past he's been building the case and it's been getting darker and darker. *"But now"* the light shines through. In this section he gives us some great gospel words or concepts. These are important you should not miss. They describe the three miracles that God does for you when you're saved. These three key concepts or words all describe what God has done for us that we cannot do for ourselves.

In vs. 21-26, Paul gives us a detailed explanation. He says there **are nine things about salvation.** Every single phrase in these verses is important.

1. **It is unearned. *"apart from the law"*.** Up in v. 20 it says no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the Law. You don't get to heaven by works, by trying to earn it, by keeping the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount. You are not saved by earning it, by working for it. It's apart from the Law. In the Old Testament there are three kinds of law: moral law, civil law, ceremonial law. These three kinds of laws are talked about in the first five books of the Bible. Paul says none of these are going to get you to heaven. It is apart from the law. God has always saved people the same way.

2. **It is based on God's goodness, not ours.**

"the righteousness of God" Why do we need the righteousness of God? Simply put, because we have no righteousness of our own. But what of the good works that I do? They are but filthy rags in his sight as Isaiah 64:6 says.

To some people, this is tragic news. They think that because of some inherited goodness that God will accept them. Wrong! Goodness isn't inherited like the color of your skin. In fact, what you inherited from your parents is a sin nature that causes you to turn away from God almost from the moment of your birth. You were born with an inbred tendency to disobedience. No one had to teach you to say "No!" It was automatic to you. The only kind of righteousness that will save us is a righteousness that comes from outside yourself. That's what Paul means when he talks of the righteousness of God.

3. It is unhidden.

"has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify." It's not a secret. It has been around for a long time. People had been saved all throughout history. It's been there since the time of the Old Testament. How did they get saved before Jesus came? They were forward-looking. They believed in the coming of the Messiah.

So, Paul is saying the whole Bible teaches the same thing. You're saved by grace through faith. It's not something new that just happens in the New Testament. When you look at the sacrificial system it teaches that somebody was going to die for somebody else.

4. It is through faith. *"through faith in Jesus Christ."* When you look at this passage and look at how many times the word "faith" is used, you realize that the whole Christian life can be summed up in the word "faith".

Now, there are two mistakes people make when it comes to faith in Christ.

a. They say "I don't have enough faith." It doesn't matter how much or how little you've got. It's not the amount. It's the object that you put it in. The Bible says if you have faith of a mustard seed you can move a mountain. It's not the size of your faith, it's the size of your God. You don't have to have a lot of faith.

b. The second mistake is putting faith in faith. They think their faith in their faith is going to get them to heaven. No, it's faith in a person. Your faith is only as good as the object you put it in.

Faith doesn't save you; Christ does. The Bible says even the devil believes and trembles and you're not going to find the devil in heaven. A lot of people are going to miss heaven by 18 inches -- they have a head knowledge but not a heart knowledge. Faith in Greek means to trust in, cling to, rely on, adhere to. Faith is belief with trust and commitment.

5. It is available to everybody who believes. *"... to all who believe."* Salvation is available to everybody because everybody needs it. You just believe. It's not believe and work real hard. Example: Let's say you're going to take an elevator up to the twentieth floor of the building. You get on the elevator, go up three floors and then get off. Then you climb the stairs for three floors. Then you get back on the elevator and go up another three. Then you get off and climb the stairs ... Would that be silly? Sure. A lot of people try to get saved that way. Trust in Christ and then work real hard, trust for awhile, then work ... No! Once you get on the elevator you stay on and trust it to get you all the way to the top. That's the way it is being a Christian. When I became a Christian I laid my life in God's hands, "God, I don't understand it all but I'm laying my faith and trust in You." Salvation is available to all who believe. Believe means to put your confidence in.

6. It is necessary. v. 23 *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* It's necessary because we've all fallen short. The two verbs in this verse, "have" and "fall short" are in two different tenses in Greek.

Regarding "Have", it is in what's called the aorist tense. It simply means past, done for, once and for all. So, *"All have sinned"* is an established fact. But then it

says, "*and fall short*". This is in the present tense which means continual, ongoing, continually falling short. It's a continuous action and it doesn't quit!

Have you ever heard anybody say, "I'm better than so and so" -- they think God is going to grade on the curve. In the Air Force, the minimum height limit to be a pilot is 5'2". One guy applies and he's 5'1". He says, "You ought to take me because I'm almost 5'2". Do you think he qualifies? Of course not. He still falls short. By the way, I didn't know that. I could've been a pilot. I'm over by 2 inches. So, that's what God says, we all fall short.

Now, what is "*the glory of God*" in this context? Different scholars have different opinions on this. I agree with those who say that the glory of God is referring to the way God made man intentionally to be. He's talking about God's ideal. When God made man in the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve brought glory to God because they were perfect, they had a perfect relationship. But they blew it! They sinned and fell short and the glory was lost.

Thus, "*all fall short of God's glory*" means we all fall short of God's ideal. We all fall short of the potential that God has put into each of our lives. We sin and we lose that potential.

7. It's undeserved. Now we're getting down to the meat of the passage. v. 24 is one of the most significant verses in the entire Bible. "... *and all are justified freely by his grace...*" Our salvation is undeserved. We get it freely by God's grace. The word "freely" literally means without a cause. It's used one other time, in John 15:25 where Jesus says, is speaking about how the world did not come to Christ but they hated Christ and He was being rejected. The disciples were bothered by this and Jesus said if the world hates Him it will hate His disciples.

"But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without

reason." Other translations say "*without a cause.*" That is the same word that is used in Romans that means "freely."

So, there's no reason for God to save us. But he did.

How many of you remember when your kids were preschoolers? You'd say "Why did you do that?" and he would say "Because!" You're expecting a comma there and he's going to give you a reason but he thinks it's a period. Because -- you're supposed to be satisfied with that. Because why? Because! As if that's enough. I realize, in studying the Scripture, that that is a Biblical answer! The Bible says, "Why are you justified?" and God says, "Because!"

We see this over in the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 7:6. Why did God choose the Jews? Of all the nations He could have chosen, why did He choose the Jews? This verse says God chose them just because! That's the reason! **"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession."** Does it give a reason? No! He chose. Why? Just because! Why did He love them? Did they deserve that He love them? It was without a cause.

That's what Paul is saying here about our own salvation. Romans 3. There is no intrinsic reason that we deserve to be saved. We'll see this illustrated when we get to chapter 4 next week.

Justified is a key word in the Bible. That's the first important concept here. It's a legal term -- a term used in a courtroom. It literally means "to declare not guilty." Acquitted. It is the legal act of God declaring guilty people guiltless. It changes our standing before God. We need to be justified because we all have fallen short. Now, **we are justified three ways:**

a. **By grace.** v. 24. The word grace is the same word from which we get our word charity. Charity comes from the Greek word for grace – charis. Like charismatic.

It's supposed to mean someone who is gracious. Thus, Paul is saying God is gracious in saving us. We do not deserve to be declared "not guilty" but God does it because he is gracious.

2. By His blood. v. 25. *"God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in His blood."* Hebrews 9:22 says *"Without the shedding of blood there is forgiveness."*

The source of our justification is grace, the ground of our justification is blood. The condition is in v. 28.

3. By faith. *"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith."* We're justified three ways: by grace, by blood, and by faith. Justification is more than just forgiveness. It means that there is absolutely, no longer, any case at all against you. The charges are dropped! It is forgiveness plus righteousness.

Now, the word justified is in the passive tense, that's another Greek tense, which emphasizes the action done. So, Paul emphasizes that we truly have been declared innocent by God. We are not guilty just because!

8. The eighth thing we can say about our salvation is that **it comes through a person.** Jesus.

"... through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus". It doesn't come through a religion or through baptism or a ritual. It doesn't come through principles, a bunch of do's and don'ts. It comes through a person. Jesus Christ.

So, we come to the second key word or concept. **Redemption.** Salvation is made possible because of our redemption. What is redemption? It means to release by paying a ransom. It was used two different ways in Paul's day in the Roman Empire.

a. It was used to refer to slaves. Every day you could go downtown Rome to the open market and there was a slave market. You could go and buy slaves.

There were over a half million slaves in Rome when Paul wrote this letter. Over half the population in Rome were slaves. If you had the money you could buy slaves that were put up on the auction block and do whatever you wanted to with them. You could kill them. You had total rights to those slaves in the Roman Empire. They had no rights at all. When you would go to a slave market and buy a slave you would pay a redemption, a price to release that slave. You could either take them home with you or you could set them free. That's the term Paul is using here. Paul later on talks about how we are in a sense spiritual slaves. We are slaves to our habits that we can't break, to our passions, to our own desires, to sin. Jesus Christ came and paid the ransom.

An example of this. 1 Cor. 6:19-20 *"Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own. You were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body."* What price? When Jesus Christ gave His life for us, He bought our freedom. He paid the price, the ransom, the redemption.

Do you know Blue Chip Stamps? They became popular in the 1960's. You could get them from grocery stores, pharmacies, even at gas stations. You'd save them and then take them down to the Blue Chip Redemption Center. Why? You're going to go in and pay something to set some item free and take it home with you. That's what redemption is all about. You or somebody pays a price. In this case God paid a price for us to set us free from sin.

It was used to refer to slaves. It was also used in another sense that all of us can relate to: taking of hostages, kidnapping. When some plane gets hijacked and they land somewhere and say, "You can have these people back if you will set a certain number of people free in exchange." That is a transaction of redemption. Somebody paying for somebody else's freedom.

In a sense we're hostages. In 2 Tim. 2:24 and following, Paul is talking about the duties of pastors and saying these things to Timothy who was a pastor or an elder. BTW, these words are interchangeable. bishop, pastor, elder. In scripture they're all one and the same. So you can call me elder, but just not elderly. *"And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will."* Paul says we're held hostage by the devil against our will. And God sets us free. He redeems us. Titus 2:13-14a says, *"While we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us"*

9. The last thing we can say about our salvation is that it cost God a lot. **It is expensive.** It is free but it is not free. It is a gift but somebody had to pay for the gift. The gift was Jesus Christ giving His own life. **Romans 3:25. " God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood."** **Atonement** is the third key word. There is so much in this word that next week we're going to spend the entire session on this one verse. It's one of the most important concepts you need to understand. It is a word that is used only twice in the New Testament. Here and one other place in Hebrews. Some translations use the word "propitiation". But it's used all through the Old Testament. In Hebrew it's the word Kippur. Yom Kippur -- the Day of Atonement.

The question is how can a God who is righteous and totally just forgive us and yet judge the sin at the same time? How does He get away with that? That's the most important question you'll ever ask. How can a God who is totally pure and cannot stand any sin at all forgive us and yet deal with the sin at the same time?

The answer to that is this one word, Atonement. This one word explains why Jesus Christ had to come and die on the cross.

The point is this, God, when He forgives, he can't just say, "Forget it! It's no big deal!" God is totally just. So He has to have a reason to forgive us. There has to be a basis for it. God has a basis for it in the fact that Jesus Christ died for us. All of this is seen in the Old Testament. And as I mentioned, we're look at more closely at the concept of Atonement next week.

Now, why did God create the plan of salvation? Why did God send Jesus Christ to do that? He did it for **two reasons: a reason in the past and a reason in the future.**

a. Beforehand. *"He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished."* (v. 25b)

Did God let people get away with their past sins? Actually, Paul is talking about those who lived before Christ came. He's referring to all of the sins committed B.C. -- Before Christ. He's saying God passed over those sins because God looked ahead and knew what Jesus Christ would do. He said, "I know what's happening now but I know who's going to pay for it. There is someone who is going to pay for them. There is a coming Messiah." He was patient when people sinned in the Old Testament because He knew Jesus would die. All of the Old Testament animal sacrifices never saved anybody. They were just the symbol of what was really going to happen years later. When Jesus died he reached all the way back to Adam and paid for every sin that had ever been done wrong since the beginning of the world. That took care of the past, but that doesn't help us.

The next verse helps us.

b. Present. All of us were born A.D. He said God did this to show His justice regarding those born after Christ -- ***" he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at***

the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus." (v. 2a) -- Jesus was God's representative and Jesus was man's representative. He played both sides. God is just in forgiving us. He has a reason to forgive us because of what Jesus Christ did.

Folks, the cross covers the past, the present, and the future. When Jesus Christ died on the cross He's already died for sins you're going to commit tomorrow. He not only died for the ones you committed yesterday, and the ones you committed today but when Jesus died on the cross He died for everything I'm going to do for the rest of my life. He died for the sins my kids are going to commit and their kids. It paid past, present, and future.

Paul concludes by mentioning the consequences of salvation. He says in light of all these heavy truths there are **two implications of salvation:**

a. **There is no reason for pride and prejudice.** v. 27-30 *"Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law. Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith."*

Folks, God loves us all. Both the Jews and the Gentiles. We're all saved the same way, by faith. There is no nation, no race, no denomination that's going to get you into heaven. None will get you into heaven. And you shouldn't look down or envy anybody else. When someone has the attitude, "We've got it and you don't!" -- they don't! Because God says there is no pride and prejudice.

b. **There is no presumption.** V. 31 *"Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law."*

Here's the connection. If salvation is by faith and not by keeping the law, does that not make the law null and void? Or in other words, why bother with the Ten Commandments?

“Not at all!” is Paul's energetic reply. Nothing in his teaching is meant to say that the law has no value. It has enormous value ... but not as a means of salvation. You aren't saved by keeping the Ten Commandments, but that doesn't mean you can forget about them and live any way you like.

But what does Paul mean when he says that his teaching “upholds” or “establishes” the law? He means that his doctrine puts the law of God in its proper place. When all things are seen correctly, the law is fully established and honored ... but not as a means of salvation. The Living Bible says, “If we are saved by faith, does that mean we no longer need to obey God's laws? Just the opposite! In fact, only when we trust Jesus can we truly obey him.”

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I thank You so much for those words *"but now"*. In spite of all the facts of our sin that we've looked at in the first three chapters, that isn't the end of the story. Jesus Christ, thank You for justifying us, for declaring us guiltless, innocent, just as if we've never sinned. Thank You. Lord, thank You for redeeming us. Thank You for that illustration, that You set us free from slavery to our own desires and slavery to the devil and You ransomed us and You paid the price with Your own death. Jesus Christ, thank You for atoning for our sins. Thank You that God is satisfied with what You did and that a Holy God could forgive us because of what You've done. Really, Lord, You did it Yourself because You are God. Thank You that we are forgiven

and when we put our trust and faith in You we stand before Jesus Christ spotless and without sin and in Your eyes You see us as perfect. Lord, help us to live that way. Help us not to go around under a cloud of condemnation because we have been forgiven. Thank You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.