

240707am Sermon Transcript

James Midwinter

Romans 3:9-20

(This sermon transcript is an extract of a video recording of the full service. The numbering is auto-applied and reflects the number of minutes into recording that the transcript relates to.)

37:05

Well, if you've ever watched a trial, you will know just how important that closing argument is that a lawyer makes.

39:11

It's a last opportunity to try and convince the judge, the jury of what they are trying to prove and help them understand how all of the evidence points towards the conclusion that they've got in mind.

39:24

And that's how important Romans 3 is today.

39:30

Although it appears in one sense at the beginning of the book, we've seen that Paul's got a very clear argument that he's been making.

39:36

And, and this is the concluding bit of that argument which began.

39:40

If you want to flip back to chapter one and verse 18, Paul made that really big statement.

39:48

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them.

40:03

And ever since then Paul has been proving that argument.

40:08

So for the rest of chapter one.

40:10

He looked out to a very wicked Gentile world in his day and showed how there is an abundance of sin in all of that.

40:19

But he knew that there'd be some people who would say, well, yeah, that's fine, but that's not me.

40:25

So the beginning of chapter two, he starts focusing on people who hold themselves out as being moral and righteous, but he shows them that actually they're living hypocritical lives because they're not being moral and righteous themselves.

40:40

The rest of chapter 2 into chapter 3, it has shown us that the nation of Israel wouldn't be exempt from God's judgements.

40:49

The Jews had massive privileges.

40:51

We thought about that last week.

40:52

There was no question about the privileges of the Jewish people, but their downfall would be that they held onto the fact that they were God's chosen people and yet broke his law themselves.

41:07

Now I hope that over the last, what's it been four weeks or so, as we've worked through all of those sections, you've you've been persuaded by what Paul has said and maybe like me, you're longing for Paul to get to the good news.

41:22

And I promise you, it's coming.

41:24

If you look at the beginning of verse 21, there is one of those glorious but now statements that you see in lots of Paul's letters.

41:31

And we're going to see the beginning of the gospel hope that is to come in light of all of the mess that we have been looking at for the last few chapters.

41:38

But before we get there, Paul's got a closing argument to make.

41:42

Paul was trained as a lawyer.

41:45

He wants every single one of us to be absolutely convinced about a big idea in his mind that he needs to put into your heart.

41:54

And it's this, you need to know the sinfulness of sin and how none of us can escape that judgement for ourselves.

42:09

That is the massive idea that he's got to press home.

42:13

You might have listened to the first three chapters of this book and so far thought, yeah, I agree with all that.

42:20

Seems solid to me.

42:22

World's a mess.

42:24

See that on the news every single day, every single week.

42:27

And I know I'm not perfect, but nobody is.

42:30

And it's not that big a deal because my sin, by comparison to everything else, is not really that serious.

42:37

Or maybe you'd go a step further and you'd say, yeah, I get that the world's a mess, and I get that my sin's a problem and I get that all of this is going on in the world.

42:44

But I know about Jesus and I know that everything's sorted.

42:48

So can we just move past the judgement bid and get to all the peace that comes Now?

42:54

There the heart responds that Paul's addressing here.

42:59

Every single one of us is in danger of underestimating the sinfulness of our sin.

43:08

And if you're not yet a Christian, the way that your brain might process that is to say, well, sin's not so serious.

43:15

Therefore, if there is a problem at all, I'm sure I can get myself out of it.

43:21

Or if you are a Christian and you don't see how sinful sin is, you can lose sight of the wonder of your salvation in the 1st place.

43:35

Wherever you are this morning, every single one of us needs to hear afresh how sinful our sin really is.

43:45

So what I want to do today is a little bit unusual.

43:48

If you're here with us regularly, we'll read a passage and then myself, Matthew, whoever's preaching, we'll slowly work through it.

43:54

What I want to do today is take you through the whole of Paul's arguments so that you see how this closing argument hangs together.

44:01

And as we go through it, there are going to be a number of questions that pop up in your mind that are going to leave you thinking.

44:07

But hang on.

44:09

So once we've gone through the whole thing, I'm going to come back and we're going to dig into a few of those questions that I think are perhaps particularly hard for for our generation to hear and accept.

44:21

But start with big idea.

44:23

Here's Paul's closing argument.

44:25

Our sin is more serious than we think.

44:29

That's the big idea.

44:30

Our sin is more serious than we think.

44:33

And if you were here with us last week, you'll see there's a linkage between what he began with in chapter 3, verses one and two, to what he comes back to in verse 9.

44:43

So last week we saw Jews had great privileges, absolutely.

44:49

And particularly what he highlighted last week was that they'd been given the very words of God, which is an enormous privilege.

44:58

And yet at the same time, hearing that message was not enough to save any of them.

45:06

In that sense, verse 9, the Jews, who I think is the person who's the we that we have any advantage, I think the Jews are the ones that Paul's coming back to and is thinking.

45:16

In that sense, the Jews didn't have any advantage over the Gentiles because you could have been born in a God fearing Jewish household or you could have been born in the House of a Pagan prostitute if you didn't take advantage of the blessings of being in that home.

45:32

You look at his conclusion in verse 9, under the power of sin, we've already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles are like are all under the power of sin.

45:45

Now if you've been tracking with us through Romans, you'll know that's the first time that Paul has used the word sin to describe it more like a force or a power.

45:55

So all the way through this point, there are times Paul's talked about sin.

45:59

It's got specific actions or specific thoughts or deeds in mind.

46:05

Whereas here he begins to show us that there are other ways that we need to understand sin too.

46:10

So by the time we get to chapter 6, he's going to talk about sin, enslaving and ruling and exercising lordship over people.

46:20

He's going to describe us as either being slaves to sin or freed from sin.

46:26

We're going to come back to this in in just a minute, but right at the very beginning of this closing argument, Paul's point is none of us are spiritually neutral.

46:39

We are not born as a blank canvas.

46:46

We are born, conceived and born under the power of sin.

46:51

And what Paul's going to do in verses 10 to 18 is he's going to string together a whole series of Old Testament quotes to prove that point, to show all of us the, the pervasiveness and the, the, the, the perversion of sin that has ruined every single part of our lives.

47:10

And it's really important that he goes back to the Old Testament.

47:14

He uses the Old Testament Scriptures very deliberately to prove that this idea about the seriousness of sin is not just something that he's made-up.

47:26

Maybe you're sitting there thinking, well, of all the writers in the Bible, Paul's the heaviest.

47:33

I don't really like Paul, but there's other books in the Bible that I like better, so I'm just not going to think too much about the seriousness of sin.

47:44

These, however many quotations there are, there's a bit of debate about exactly where each one comes from.

47:49

They are all there to show us that if we've got an argument about the sinfulness of sin, it's with God and not Paul, because this is what he has always been teaching his people.

48:03

And it's perhaps particularly important when Paul originally wrote this letter that he used Jewish scriptures to make this point because the Jews could have been sat there thinking, well, you're you're this new starter of a new religion called Christianity.

48:17

That may be your beef, but it's not an issue we need to worry about.

48:21

And so Paul's using all of these Jewish scriptures to show them this applies to you Jews, to Gentiles, to everyone equally.

48:34

Paul's compiled all of this in a, in a way that you could think of it as a, as a bit like the anatomy of sin.

48:40

And maybe the most helpful person that I read during the course of this week, Tim Keller, he's identified 7 different effects of sin.

48:49

OK, So what?

48:50

What is the sinfulness of sin?

48:51

Well, here are seven ways in which it cascades into every single part of our life.

48:57

And I want you to, I want to run through them with you #1 Sin effects our legal standing.

49:03

Said a few minutes ago, none of us are spiritually neutral.

49:06

Not only verse 9, because we're under the power of sin.

49:09

Verse 10, Paul tells us that no one is righteous, not even one.

49:15

I don't know what you think about the idea of righteousness.

49:19

Maybe in your mind it's a spectrum with the Super holy over here and the Super sinful over here, and most of us would place ourselves somewhere between here and here, Paul says.

49:31

It's not a spectrum, it's binary.

49:37

We are sinful from conception and birth and all of us are unrighteous.

49:45

It effects our legal standing.

49:46

Secondly, it affects our minds.

49:48

Verse 11, There is no one who understands.

49:54

Left to ourselves, not a single person can understand God's word.

49:59

And, and perhaps you might remember what Paul says in another one of his letters.

50:01

This is Corinthians 4 and verse four.

50:05

The God of this age, meaning the devil, has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

50:19

That's how much sin has ruined our ability to think not just about religion, but biblically about all of life.

50:29

Which explains why there are brilliant Nobel Peace winning, excuse me, Nobel Peace winning geniuses who don't believe God's word.

50:40

I think there are lots of Christians who struggle with that.

50:43

Lots of Christians think if some of the smartest men and women on the planet don't believe the Bible's true, then surely humble, small, not super intelligent me may be wrong because they're convinced.

50:58

For what does Paul tell us?

51:01

Paul shows us that Christianity is not a test of intelligence.

51:07

Christianity's a revelation, and it begins by revealing to us that left to ourselves, not one of us can understand God's Word rightly.

51:19

That leads us, thirdly, to see that sin has affected our motives.

51:23

Back at verse eleven, no one seeks God.

51:27

We're going to come back to this one in just a minute as well.

51:29

But I want us to see here that it's not just affected our minds, it's affected our wills.

51:36

Left to ourselves, we just don't want to find God.

51:40

We're still living out Adam and Eve's original reaction after they ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

51:46

When they messed up that very first time, they didn't hang around and wait for God to ask what had gone wrong.

51:53

They didn't actively pursue God and say we've messed up.

51:57

What did they do?

51:58

They hid.

52:01

They didn't want to seek God because they knew what they'd done.

52:05

And by nature, that's still our default response.

52:08

And it's really deliberate because fourthly, sins affected our wills.

52:12

Look at verse 12.

52:14

All have turned away.

52:18

That's a very deliberate verb.

52:20

It's not that lots of people in the world are just ignorant.

52:24

They're not in a kind of morally culpable way.

52:27

They just don't know what is, what is true about the gospel.

52:31

And so they've not heard, so they've not had an opportunity to turn.

52:33

That's not what the Bible tells us.

52:36

We've seen everything Paul said about general Revelation in chapter one.

52:39

We've seen everything that he said about his revealed world in chapter two and three.

52:43

And Paul's saying our problem is that we have wilfully turned away from God.

52:51

Sin puts me, I in the centre.

52:56

SINI go into the centre, not God.

52:59

And that's the way men and women and boys and girls, we live our lives until God saves us.

53:08

We're not looking for him for help.

53:12

We're looking for hope and help and wholeness from ourselves and the other things that we create.

53:20

Fifthly, sin has affected our tongues.

53:23

Verses 13 and 14, which when you read them the first time, you think that's a bit strong and you think about some of the things that you may have said this week.

53:38

I don't think Paul's overstating it at all.

53:40

He says how serious all of this is, but before you get into the detail of what he says, it's important that we remember that we have been made in the image of a speaking God.

53:52

So if you want to have a sense of how serious it is that we're speaking in this way, we need to remember that we were made to image and speak on behalf of a God who always speaks goodness and truth and mercy and right.

54:12

What do we do poetically?

54:15

Paul says that we speak with throats like an open grave.

54:19

Put yourself in the shoes of the Middle East, where in Paul's day to have an open grave where the corpse has started to warm up in the heat of that Middle Eastern sun smell.

54:34

To put it mildly, instead of speaking words of truth like God, we practise deceit.

54:43

The effect of our words is all too often to pull people down, not to build them up, as though we had the poison of Vipers on our lips.

54:52

And all of that that comes out isn't just the odd occasional thing when everything gets on top of us.

54:58

Paul says our mouths are full of cursing and bitterness, which is dreadful and really, really bad.

55:08

If you stop there, that's that's serious enough.

55:11

But do you remember what Jesus teaches us about our words?

55:15

Our words are the overflow of our hearts.

55:19

So the things that we're saying are a window of the state of our hearts before God.

55:29

Sixthly, verses 15 to 17, sin effects our relationships with each other.

55:38

And look at how broadly Paul describes all of this.

55:41

We don't hurt people because something extreme happens and we're prompted to act in ways that we wouldn't otherwise normally react.

55:50

Paul says we are swift to hurt others.

55:53

That's that's our natural response.

55:56

And all of these descriptions about ruin and misery and lack of peace, they're not a subjective description of how all of our sin makes us feel, that we would feel bad for ourselves because all of this is going on in the world and and that makes us feel really bad.

56:09

That's not what Paul's saying.

56:12

He's saying because of how we act and speak and all the things that we are doing, this is the impact on other people.

56:21

Sin has tainted all of it.

56:22

Ultimately, verse 18, all of that, all of the previous examples is because our relationship with God has been ruined by sin.

56:34

That is the foundational problem.

56:38

It's not educational, it's not sociological, it's not intellectual, it's not financial.

56:45

Our ultimate problem is a theological problem.

56:50

There is No Fear of God in our eyes.

56:53

Left to ourselves, we have no sense that the way that we are living in the world that God has made has a direct bearing on our relationship with Him.

57:03

Sin has ruined that relationship with God, and because that's ruined, the way that we are meant to relate to Him and image bear His goodness and His beauty and His kindness to all people has been damaged so that all of those other six things have been ruined as a consequence.

57:27

Now we need to remind ourselves that our greatest problem is theological.

57:33

On the Sunday after a general election, I don't know which party any of you voted for.

57:39

I don't know whether you're sat in your seats this morning feeling optimistic or pessimistic about the future of our government.

57:47

But if you're a Christian, I want you to read Romans 3 and see that it is never our ultimate hope that social policies and politicians can fix our country because our need is much greater.

58:02

Our biggest and greatest need is that God would break into our nation.

58:10

He would reveal Himself and convict men and women and boys and girls of their sin and bring them back to Himself.

58:17

Because until that vertical relationship is healed, none of the other things that are broken here in our horizontal relationships can be healed either.

58:29

Guys, we can just put that screen back up just for one second.

58:31

Thank you.

58:33

Just have a look at all of those implications for sin.

58:40

Devastatingly comprehensive, aren't they?

58:45

And that's why Christians since the Reformation have described the seriousness, the sinfulness of sin as a total depravity.

58:57

And sometimes when you hear that, you think, well, that sounds a bit strong because I'm not.

59:03

My friends aren't, my family aren't.

59:05

In fact, the world at large generally isn't as sinful as it could possibly be.

59:09

And that's true.

59:11

By God's grace we are not as sinful as we could be.

59:15

But that's never been the point that was trying to be made from that teaching.

59:22

The doctrine of total depravity is trying to summarise everything that Romans 3 has been teaching us.

59:30

As you look out at the world in your own heart, sin effects everything all the time in every one of us.

59:43

That's the sinfulness of sin.

59:45

And now we're ready for Paul's punchline, verse 19.

59:48

Here comes the conclusion of this closing argument, verse 19.

59:51

We are all going to be held accountable to God.

59:55

And when that day comes, not one of us will have a leg to stand on in ourselves because every single thing that we have thought and said and done.

1:00:07

And everything that we have failed to think and do and say rightly is going to be laid before the judge of all mankind and every mouth will be silenced.

1:00:24

I I don't know which trials you follow.

1:00:27

There are some that have been in the international press recently that it's been hard not to follow.

1:00:33

And we're all quite familiar, aren't we, with court trials that finish and a sentence is made and the now convicted criminal refuses to accept what's been said.

1:00:46

So they'll leave the court angry and steaming.

1:00:51

They'll be protesting their innocence.

1:00:53

They'll be already lodging their attempt to appeal for their innocence.

1:00:58

Not before this judge, the most proud and arrogantly sinful person who hates God with the core of their being, will be shtum because nobody can question God's judgement and nothing we can do by ourselves between now and then can help us.

1:01:29

That's verse 20.

1:01:31

No one will ever be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law.

1:01:39

That's Paul's argument and there's no wriggle ring or is there?

1:01:51

See, I reckon if you went and read this passage to your neighbours, your non Christian family, when you get home, they'd push back on some of this.

1:02:02

People have been disputing Paul's diagnosis here for 2000 years of the church's existence.

1:02:10

And perhaps in our day there are at least three specific claims that people are going to challenge in particular.

1:02:17

That's what I want us to dig into for our last little few minutes here.

1:02:20

Let's start at verse 11.

1:02:22

Paul says no one seeks God.

1:02:27

Isn't that demonstrably untrue?

1:02:31

I read this week the the World Values Survey for the UK that was published in 2023, and in many ways the results, the conclusions wouldn't surprise you.

1:02:42

It's full of all sorts of graphs and charts and that include very, very sensible data that's all being produced by King's College London and many other organisations.

1:02:50

And it tells us in one sense, lots of things that we already knew, but just with statistical numbers behind them that show us that religion in one sense is on the decline and followers of atheism are on the rise.

1:03:05

And all of that is perhaps unsurprising in our day.

1:03:09

I, I didn't know whether I could get the copyright to show this graph, so I won't do it on a screen.

1:03:14

But even in their own conclusion of the nations that they say that they believe in God, the UK may be towards the bottom, but still 50% of our country say they believe in God.

1:03:29

And there's a really interesting chart that shows that the younger you are, so particularly if you've been born after 1965, you're a Gen Z, Gen X millennial, you are more likely to believe in life after death than those who are older.

1:03:44

So when you know all of that is true and you know that from your own experience too, right?

1:03:51

You don't need me to show you a survey.

1:03:53

You you've got enough friends who are asking spiritual questions.

1:03:57

Any of us can walk into a bookshop, a secular bookshop and there's a spirituality section and you know, you might find a Bible.

1:04:04

You're also going to find books on Buddhism and Hinduism and Zoroastrianism and self help guides to everything.

1:04:10

But if you look at all of that in the round, surely your conclusion is loads of people are seeking God.

1:04:19

In fact, maybe more people are seeking God.

1:04:23

If you define that term really broadly, then they're not seeking God.

1:04:27

So isn't what Paul says here just wrong?

1:04:30

Aren't people seeking God?

1:04:34

But Paul isn't saying people aren't interested in a God.

1:04:41

Men and women have been making gods of their own inventions since the very beginning of time.

1:04:47

We create gods that we can worship in ways that fit in with our lives without causing us a great deal of inconvenience.

1:04:54

We create a belief system or some kind of structure that enables us to think, well, you know what?

1:05:00

There's something out there that can help me that I can turn to in a time of need.

1:05:07

All of that's absolutely true.

1:05:08

But what Paul's saying here is that no one, by their own volition, is seeking the God of the Bible.

1:05:15

Left to ourselves, not one person is seeking the holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty that we began singing.

1:05:25

No one seeks the God who has complete authority over absolutely every single section of our lives.

1:05:35

He sustains us literally, breath by breath.

1:05:39

He's the one whose view of life must shape ours, because we're living in His world.

1:05:46

So everything that he has to say about money, sex and power and everything else in between is his determination, not ours.

1:05:55

We don't seek a God who determines all of those things.

1:05:58

We don't seek for God who is the judge of all mankind, before whom one day every single person will have to give an account for their lives.

1:06:06

And we do not by ourselves seek the Saviour of souls, who's the only way, the truth and the life.

1:06:20

That's what Paul's absolutely right about.

1:06:23

No one seeks God.

1:06:25

But there's a wonderfully encouraging flip side to that coin too.

1:06:33

Because men and women and boys and girls are seeking God.

1:06:38

There are people today in our church family who have come to faith and are now asking to be baptised.

1:06:45

There are people who've repented, turned away from a life of sin.

1:06:48

They've trusted in Jesus as the only hope for themselves and they're seeking to follow him.

1:06:53

So how do you square that circle?

1:06:58

None of it undermines what Paul said.

1:07:03

Not one of us by ourselves can seek God.

1:07:07

So the fact that people are shows us that God is at work in their lives doing something they could never do themselves.

1:07:17

The fact that men and women and boys and girls are asking those questions, coming to a church, to a gathering of Christians and asking them, how can I be saved?

1:07:28

If sin is this sinful, what is my hope?

1:07:34

The very existence of those conversations is proof.

1:07:36

Not that Paul's wrong.

1:07:37

He's right because he's speaking with the help of God.

1:07:39

The proof of those questions is that God is at work in people's lives, helping them see that this matters.

1:07:48

And you need to know that God is your Saviour.

1:07:52

So if that's you this morning, for all that you are seeing in this text about how serious and sinful sin is, I want you to be encouraged that if God is warming your hearts to these things, you can't do that yourself.

1:08:06

That is the work of God in your soul.

1:08:10

So keep pursuing Him until you know that you're right with him.

1:08:16

Another statement that Paul makes that I think our our generation particularly struggles with, maybe every generation does, but certainly ours is in verse 12.

1:08:24

No one does good.

1:08:27

Isn't that just patently false?

1:08:32

I I did some reading this week and according to the Charities Aid Foundation, the British public donated a record amount to charity last year.

1:08:42

Anyone want to hazard a guess for how much the good people of our fairlands contributed to charity?

1:08:48

Give me some numbers.

1:08:52

10 billion.

1:08:52

10 billion.

1:08:56

Bit more 13.9 billion, that's a lot good, right?

1:09:03

And and then there's all the unknown and unfamous giving that takes place, all the small acts of

kindness towards a friend who's struggling all the times when you might see someone nearby who's struggling with bags or in any other kind of way.

1:09:22

And you reach out and help us countless ways that the world is doing good, right.

1:09:26

So when you read verse 12, doesn't it leave you thinking that Christianity just sounds arrogant and out of date?

1:09:33

The Bible says no one does good and you're like, there's 13.9 billion in charity.

1:09:36

Surely that's not true.

1:09:40

Well, it would be true as a criticism and Paul would be wrong if he was talking about good in that broad general sense, but he's not.

1:09:50

The Bible speaks very warmly of what we call the common grace of God.

1:09:55

That means that men and women and boys and girls, whether they're Christians or not, are still living out some of the wonderful privileges of being made in the image of God, one of which is all of this generosity that flows towards the needy.

1:10:09

But that's not Paul's point here.

1:10:11

I don't think his point is even that.

1:10:15

There's lots of good that goes on in the world.

1:10:17

But the Bible says it's not just the ACT that matters, it's also the motivation.

1:10:23

And that's a major problem for Christians and non Christians too, because Paul tells the Corinthians, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, any act of kindness, any good that you may do to anyone, do it all for the glory of God.

1:10:44

So you think about some of the good things that you've done in your life or that you know that others have done in theirs.

1:10:51

How many of those acts of good have not met the God centred motivation test?

1:11:00

How many of them have actually been because we want to feel better or we want others to think well of us?

1:11:09

And on and on it goes.

1:11:11

But I don't think even that's Paul's focus here.

1:11:14

I don't think it's that there's good going on in the world.

1:11:15

There is because of common grace.

1:11:17

I don't think that it's sometimes we do good with the wrong motives.

1:11:20

That's true.

1:11:21

I think Paul's point in Romans 3 is not a single effort on our behalf, on our own can fix our broken relationship with God.

1:11:31

We can't bridge.

1:11:34

We can't.

1:11:34

We can't build a bridge of goodness to get back to God because we have nothing good to give him, not in a way that will restore our relationship with Him.

1:11:45

Apart from Christ, everything we do is ruined by our sin.

1:11:49

No one does good gets us to the third objection that you might fairly make, and that's in verses 19 to 20.

1:11:58

But before we get there, I want us to set the scene so that we understand how much of A wrestle this is for lots of people and perhaps even for you this morning.

1:12:09

The day is coming.

1:12:10

Paul says when verse 19, the whole world will be held accountable to God and when that day comes, perfect justice will take place.

1:12:26

There will not be a single mistake.

1:12:30

There will not be a shred of evidence that is left hidden.

1:12:35

This judgement is going to be transparent and fair and perfect.

1:12:41

So that's what's to come.

1:12:43

Now remember what Paul said is true of all of us.

1:12:47

We Paul says all of us by our nature are under the power of sin and our God's enemies so climax to his argument, verse 20.

1:13:00

Here's the unavoidable conclusion to everything he's been saying no one can save themselves.

1:13:08

Our problem is, and perhaps lots of our friends struggle is we don't believe that Paul says no one can save themselves.

1:13:18

And we'll go really.

1:13:25

And you might push back on that in different directions.

1:13:29

So some people might go down the the relative morality route as a pessimist and you might say, well, well, I'm not as bad as as John or as or as Susan, which may be right, You may not be.

1:13:44

But look at the standard that matters on the final day.

1:13:48

You are not going to be responsible for declaring whether you are good and righteous.

1:13:53

Verse 19, verse 20, the standard is being declared righteous in God's sight, and none of us can do that.

1:14:05

Maybe you go down the relative morality route as an optimist and you don't say I'm not as bad as maybe you say, well, I'm better than John and Susan.

1:14:14

Many of you perhaps have heard the story, I can't remember it now, where I first heard it.

1:14:18

Of the three swimmers who wanted to swim across the Pacific Ocean, one of them got into the water but couldn't swim and drowned as soon as they got out of their depth.

1:14:30

The second one was a reasonable swimmer and managed to get out far enough until the waves were too big for them, and then they drowned and died.

1:14:39

But maybe you think of yourself a bit like the third swimmer who was a professional swimmer.

1:14:45

They're an Olympic champion and swam miles past.

1:14:50

Everyone else just left them literally for dead.

1:14:53

Swam, swam, swam, swam, swam 100 miles of swim.

1:14:59

Can you imagine swimming 100 miles, then died of exhaustion 11,900 miles short?

1:15:11

That's us.

1:15:14

Whether you think about how you compare with anybody else and you're more of a pessimist or more of an optimist, every single one of us falls so far short because our sin has affected everything.

1:15:27

It's affected our legal standing, our minds, our motives, our wills, our tongues, our relationships, and our relationships to God.

1:15:33

There is absolutely nothing any of us can do to save ourselves.

1:15:42

What we need is to be rescued.

1:15:46

What we need is a righteousness outside of ourselves that can step into and break into our world and rescue us from the complete, inescapable mess that we are in.

1:15:59

And we're going to get there in the glorious hope of Jesus in verse 21 next week.

1:16:03

So if you're not regularly in our church family, please can I encourage you to come back because all of the heaviness of this argument has been preparing you to see how glorious the hope is that is to come.

1:16:14

So look at verses 21 and 22.

1:16:16

But now praise the Lord, for the book now is in the Bible.

1:16:20

Apart from the law.

1:16:21

The righteousness of God has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify, meaning all of the Old Testament has been preparing the way for you to see this.

1:16:31

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

1:16:39

I know you're not allowed to have favourites.

1:16:42

I think the next section of Romans 3 is perhaps my favourite passage in the whole Bible, and you can disagree with me.

1:16:50

If you come next week, I can think of something better.

1:16:54

Please do not miss the only hope of the Bible.

1:17:03

Before we close and sing our closing song, can I make a specific plea with those of you who are not yet are not yet Christians?

1:17:17

Some of you come every single week and have done for years.

1:17:21

And in your heart you may be thinking, well, you know, it's a good thing to come, but it doesn't really affect me.

1:17:28

Maybe you're here for the very first time and and you're just looking at church as a complete newcomer.

1:17:35

Or maybe you've been coming a while and what you do is you get here, you stand and you may sing for the songs, have a little drift when somebody's praying, and then you zone out when anybody comes to preach.

1:17:52

If any of those things are true of you, can I beg of you to reread verses 9 to 20 because as far as I can tell, they are the most watertight argument anywhere in the Bible that proves the judgement of God.

1:18:14

And every single one of us is born into this story.

1:18:21

We can't sit there and say this isn't for me.

1:18:25

There are eight, I think 8 references to no one and none.

1:18:29

The all at the beginning of verse 12 includes everyone.

1:18:33

We start here.

1:18:35

This is where we're all at.

1:18:38

We're born under the power of sin.

1:18:42

All we can look forward to, if we stay in that position is the judgement of God, and not one of us can do anything about it by ourselves.

1:18:53

There's a glorious hope to look forward to next week in Jesus coming to do what none of us could do.

1:19:03

But before we get there, I wonder.

1:19:06

We don't usually do so.

1:19:07

I wonder if I could pray.

1:19:10

And if you've never prayed before and you know that this passage is true of you, I'd love for you in your own heart to be able to pray with me.

1:19:23

And the rest of the church family are going to be praying that God would be at work in our hearts.

1:19:28

But praying for that first time can be really hard.

1:19:31

You think about all of this need that separates us between God and think, how could I possibly, possibly speak to this God?

1:19:43

You can because he calls you and enables you to come.

1:19:51

So let me pray and you follow in your hearts.

1:20:00

Great God in heaven.

1:20:03

We may have lived many years in this world refusing to believe that we have anything to worry about before you.

1:20:15

Though that is true, we thank you that you haven't left us to face the judgement of that problem on our own.

1:20:27

Thank you that you speak to us, You give us the explanation of our problem and show us the sinfulness of sin.

1:20:41

Father, I pray that if there are those here today who have not yet recognised their need to confess their sin and turn towards Jesus, you would help them do that today.

1:21:02

Father, would you strip away all of the other things that we might be clinging to?

1:21:09

Happy homes, good careers, prospects for the future?

1:21:16

Father, there are so many things that can cloud our ability to see that we are sinners in need of a Saviour.

1:21:29

Father, we bless you that you sent Jesus to save every single person who comes to you in repentance and faith.

1:21:42

And Father, even that is not something that we have to try and create in ourselves, as though we might then get it wrong because we don't ask with enough passion or with enough longing or remembering all of the sin that we might have committed.

1:21:56

Father, we come because we have nothing, and we ask that you would forgive us.

1:22:06

Father, You have promised that all who come to you in repentance and faith will be forgiven.

1:22:17

Your Word says that if we confess our sin, You are faithful and just and will forgive us our sin and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1:22:30

So would you give a new heart to those who don't yet know you?

1:22:37

Today we ask for the eternal hope of all those who need to come to faith, and we ask that in this and in all things we would bring you glory in Jesus name, Amen.