

The Justice of God

by Michael Durham

God's righteousness is the standard by which we will be judged, and we must strive to be righteous like God in order to be saved.

Duration: 54:46

Scripture: Jeremiah 12:1, Matthew 6:33, Romans 1:17, Romans 3:21

Topics: "Justice Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher acknowledges his limited understanding of God and his desire to have a clearer vision of Him. He emphasizes the importance of prayer and seeking God's presence in order to have a deeper sense of Him. The preacher also highlights the vastness of God and the inability of human beings to fully comprehend Him. The main focus of the sermon is on God's justice and righteousness, which the preacher sees as the standard by which humanity will be judged.

Transcript

Let's pray. Our gracious and heavenly Father, we thank Thee that Thou hearest Your children's prayers and that You have called us to pray, cast all of our cares upon You in everything, to make requests with supplication and prayer and with thanksgiving. So, Lord, we cast ourselves and our need before Thee this night that we would see Jesus and that Thy glorious righteousness would be made manifest in this place.

Lord, help this preacher by granting us the true sense of it. And we will thank You in Jesus' name, Amen. I am sure that after we are done with this conference that we will have failed in trying to define and understand God because our subject is indescribably vast and we are indescribably little.

Collect several blind men and you have no more sight than you have with one blind man. Now, the speakers that are here this week are not blind. They have been touched by heaven's physician.

But my report is much like the blind man that Jesus touched and said that he could see men walking as trees. My vision of God is but dim and through a glass darkly I see. I have very little reality of God in my soul, at least that is how I feel tonight.

Even after seeking Him in prayer all day long, I have very little sense of Him at this moment. And so I think it should be our prayers tonight, Lord, touch us again that we may see Thee more clearly. So what would be the purpose of even having meetings like this? If there's no way we can come to a greater

understanding or definition of God because of His infinite vastness, why do this? Well, I think the purpose is a necessity that in the midst of this discussion of God, God would come in our midst and give us the sense of the divine.

That we would experience Him as we extol His virtues and we brag and boast in His attributes. That God would somehow supernaturally create a divide. That divide taking place in our hearts and weaning us from this ever-present darkness we live in.

I've been assigned the task of speaking to you on the subject of God's justice. That's the way it was listed in the brochure when I received it. And so I'm going to perhaps use another term more often than the term justice tonight, and that's the term righteousness, because they are virtually the same thing.

There is somewhat of distinction in my mind, but very little to make anything about it. And so we're going to talk about tonight the righteousness of God. And the text we pray the Lord be pleased to speak to us from is Jeremiah chapter 12 and verse 1. Jeremiah chapter 12 and verse 1. Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee, yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments.

Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? There's a confusion about God's righteousness. To put it frankly, the prophet was confused. He knew what God stood for and what He demanded from His man-creatures.

But the problem was that humans were not obeying their Creator, and it seemed that they were even prospering in their disobedience. Therefore, he asked, why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive? If God is righteous, then the wicked man should get his comeuppance. He should receive the due penalty, not prosperity, is what Jeremiah is wrestling with here.

And I must admit, he seems to have a point. When it comes to God being righteous, there is some confusion today. As it was in the Bible with Jeremiah, there's confusion today.

But the modern mind's confusion is not the same perplexity that Jeremiah had. The confusion about God's righteousness today does not center around the question of why do the wicked prosper, but why do good people suffer? That's our preoccupation today. We have a propensity to play the unfair card with God.

Now, I don't make it a habit to watch Larry King, but every now and then somebody in the church will call me and say, Pastor, you need to see this. And Larry King, to me, seems to have developed the question quite well. If God is good, why does a good God let people suffer? He's asking that question all the time.

Anytime a tragedy occurs, that's his question. The other evening, I was watching, and he was interviewing former President George Bush and his wife Barbara. And he was interviewing them about their relief fund for the storm victims of Hurricane Katrina.

And he asked Barbara Bush, knowing that they were Christians, or professing Christians, and said, don't you ever wonder about your faith in times like this? I mean, can you really believe in a God who allows things like this to happen? And she said, no, I never questioned it at all. But former President Bush said he did. He said that he does question God in these times.

He knows he's a good, loving, and forgiving God, but he doesn't understand why God allows these things. But in the end, he just simply knows he has to believe in God, and so he does. Now, I'm not going to comment on his answer, because I don't think too much of it.

But, I want to comment on the question that was asked. First of all, the question is erroneously based on a wrong assumption. It's a question without foundation that totally demonstrates an arrogant, narrow-minded, extreme view of righteousness.

It depends upon thinking that God's justice is just like ours. Now, I'm going to say more about this later, but let me now say it right now. That if this is the height of arrogance to believe that we should lecture God on righteousness, thinking we have a superior perspective on the subject, even better than God.

Now, that's what the question reveals about its inquirer. But secondly, the problem with the question is that it wrongly supposes that all of us are good. But thirdly, and probably more important, the question is simply the wrong question.

If a question must be asked about God's justice and equity, then Jeremiah's question is more in line. And frankly, it is the question in light of the fury of Katrina. The question Larry King and others ought to be asking is, why did God allow the hurricane to destroy the Gulf Coast and not allow hurricanes, tornadoes, famines, and floods, and invading armies to destroy the whole country? That, to me, seems to be the more accurate question.

Why, in the light of this nation's desire to walk in the moral sewage of the sin that floods this land, does God continue to be merciful? Now, you might respond and say, well, it is because God's mercy. Yes, God is merciful. But is His justice held hostage to His mercy? This is what I think Jeremiah's problem was.

This is what he was wrestling with. If you saw a policeman watch a criminal do his dastardly deed and not do a thing to interrupt him, to stop him, would you say that that policeman was a just man? No, you wouldn't. And this is Jeremiah's problem.

He knows God is righteous. And he knows that God is also merciful. But his problem is, does mercy trump justice? And if that is true, where is righteousness then? Now, friends, confusion reigns in our country, in American Christianity, on this very subject of the righteousness of God.

And as a result, the gospel has been compromised. This generation has completely turned away from the idea of God being righteous in favor of a message that He is loving and forgiving. Justice has been eliminated from our discussions.

And we have a God who is simply incapable of rendering equity. And so to the Christian culture as well as to the secular, mercy has trumped justice. So let me direct your attention to another thought in our text.

And that is the declaration of God's justice. He says in our text, Righteous art thou, O Lord. Jeremiah is not accusing God of unrighteousness.

He's not in confusion, is God righteous or not? He declares it here. Thou art righteous, O God. His problem was in the delay of justice.

Let's look at this statement. Righteous art thou, O Lord. And let us see what we can gather about the righteousness of God.

First, I would say God's nature is righteous. God's justice is a part of His nature as much as it is what He does, an act of His will. Jeremiah says, Thou art righteous.

God, You are righteous. You act righteously because You are righteous. And so the very essence, the very nature of God is righteousness.

Now, I think we should define what we mean when we say this word righteous or justice tonight or righteousness. As the word asserts, it has something to do with being right. Being fair, being equitable, in accordance to law.

But my question is, what law is God in accordance to? The law of God is merely a reflection of His own nature and character. Therefore, it's inaccurate to say that God conforms to law. It's like saying God conforms to Himself.

He is Himself and He can't be anything but what He is. And He can't be anything that He isn't. Didn't mean to confuse you there.

I'm trying to keep you awake at this late hour. You can no more expect God to be unrighteous than you can expect a man to be a cow or a chicken. Why? Because the nature of man is completely different than that of a cow or a chicken.

It's morally impossible for God to be unrighteous. It just cannot happen. Now, what are the implications of God's righteousness? I think there are a few that we need to look at.

First of all, God is the standard of righteousness. If God is righteous, that's His nature, that's what He is. It's not just what He does.

Then we can say that God is the standard of righteousness. It's not determined by man. It's determined by God's character, what righteousness is.

Now, such kind of preaching flies in the face of the postmodernist as demeaning to man's goodness. It's an insult, not politically correct, to suggest that there might just be a higher righteousness than man's righteousness. And that man's righteousness is no longer sufficient.

This corrupt world cannot stand to hear that there is a God who is completely righteous. And why is that? If God is so righteous that a Mother Teresa or a Pope John Paul II looks like a filthy scoundrel compared to the brilliant glory of His righteousness, then what hope does any other man have? See, that's how the world thinks. If Billy Graham looks like a scoundrel compared to the searing brightness of His righteousness, then what does the common churchgoer have in hope of heaven? You see, that's why most of what we call popular Christianity cannot abide by.

It's because this God is righteous and we're not. Therefore, man will invent a God who is lesser in righteousness. If the standard of righteousness is God, then what man does is create a God that's lesser in righteousness.

God is lesser of a standard of righteousness. And therefore, man is guilty of idolatry. The biggest temple of idolatry is evangelical Baptist churches.

Because we worship a God that's different from the God of Scripture. Now, you may say this God is Jesus, but it's not the same Jesus that the apostles preached. The God revealed to us in the Bible is a God whose justice is impeccable and He's above reproach and all that He does.

But this God of the postmodern Christendom worships a God whose righteousness doesn't even exceed their own. This must mean then that God has been brought down to a level of man's own righteousness. Why? Because a perfectly righteous God could not condone sin in the least.

And so what most of us do, most churchgoers do, they sit on a Sunday morning in a service they could probably really care very little about, sing songs they don't understand and sleep through most of a sermon just in time to wake up when the final benediction is given. And they sit there thinking that that was sufficient to merit them eternal life. That is idolatry! Therefore, if God was to accept man's righteousness as His own, then God would no longer be God.

And therefore, God cannot ever accept our standard of righteousness. Well, the second implication then is if God is the standard of righteousness, then that's the standard by which we're going to be judged. Man's not the ultimate judge of goodness.

We may be lenient to someone because, well, they've never broken the law before. They've done good to society, so we might show leniency. But God judges on a completely different scale than that.

His standard is nothing less than His own character. And how could it be anything less than this? I remember as a child, my father playing a game with me. He'd take a broom handle or a baseball bat, hold it close to the ground, and I'd try to hurdle it.

He'd raise it up, and I'd hurdle it again until he got it so high I couldn't do it anymore. Well, dear friends, God is the standard, the hurdle of righteousness that a man must attain in order to get into heaven. And, sir, He isn't playing games.

That is the standard by which He has established. It is His own righteousness, and that's what we're going to be compared to. I've heard preachers and teachers say that when we get to heaven, we're going to be judged by the Ten Commandments or some other biblical standard.

But that's not correct. The law, the Ten Commandments, are nothing but a reflection of God's own character. We're going to be compared and measured to Christ.

God is the plumb line by which you and I will be measured. Not the Ten Commandments. And therefore, you must be as separated as God is from sin in order to escape condemnation.

That's the standard. I'm not preaching heresy. It's just strange to you because that's how far we've drifted from the Gospel.

Many times, we think that God, in His graciousness, has lessened the standard. Grace never lessens the standard. It upholds it.

So here's the question. Why so impossible a standard of judgment? Why so high? Well, the answer, once again, is if God would lessen the standard of acceptance, He's no longer righteous. And God must act out of His own nature, His holy nature, that loves all that's good and perfect and hates all that is not good and perfect.

He cannot require any less out of us. Well, the third implication, then, if God is righteous, is that to have eternal life, you must be righteous as God is righteous. In other words, I define eternal life or salvation as being righteous just like God.

Now, some of your faces tell me right now, you're really taking a big bite and it's hard to swallow. You're like a church I preached a revival in, I heard the other day. He just confused us.

We need to be confused. But truth will never confuse you. It's the lies we've learned and to accept as truth that confuses us.

The Gospel reveals the righteous standard by which we're all going to be measured, God Himself. Therefore, the Bible says, it has to say that justification must be being just like God is. And if you want to state God's condemnation of declared acceptable, you must be like God.

Well, I can understand your apprehension right now. But here again, modern preaching has failed to understand this and make this plain and simple. Not only does the majority of today's teaching on the Gospel Eliminator avoid the discussion of God's righteousness, but it fails to really explain what God requires to be justified.

Today, we tell them if you just confess Him as Lord or pray this little prayer, then you are saved. But friends, that falls so terribly short of what this book says. Over a year ago, we were involved in witnessing to a young man.

He became a Christian. God saved him. And he was so excited that he went to an old retired Baptist minister in Paducah that he thought a lot of.

He was so overjoyed with his conversion. He wanted to let everybody know, especially this dear man that he respected. And so he told him about it.

And the retired minister began to question him and say, Now, come on, you know you weren't. You just haven't been saved. You've maybe been rededicated or had an experience with God.

But you were saved when you were eight or nine years old, remember? Now, my friend had told me what had happened. He had gone forward in a meeting, a service, because a friend did. There was no conviction of sin, no repentance.

He was just doing what his friend did. He explained that to the older man. But he continued to insist that he was a Christian because he had confessed Jesus with his mouth.

He said to him, Has anybody ever asked you, are you a Christian? My friend said, Well, yeah, I get it during the years. Yeah, people have asked me that question. Well, how did you answer? Well, yeah, I'm a Christian because I thought I was.

Well, you see, the Bible says with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation. You have to have been a Christian all of these years. What is sad about this is that that retired Baptist preacher is not the exception.

He's the norm. That is popular American Christianity, but it isn't biblical Christianity. Nowhere in the Bible does it say what's required for salvation is just a meaningful and sincere prayer.

Rather, it clearly and repeatedly states that what is required for salvation is righteousness. God-like righteousness. Nothing less.

Human righteousness will not avail. The sinner must somehow be righteous, just like he is. That's only life eternal.

It's not in asking God to forgive you or confessing your sins. It certainly includes that, but salvation exceeds these as well. In Romans chapter 2, verse 13, for the doubting Thomases.

Romans chapter 2, verse 13. Paul states that justification, or salvation in this case, is doing the law. Or in other words, being as perfect as God is.

Because if you obey all of the law, which is a reflection of God's character, then you have required and fulfilled righteousness. Every righteous act that one should perform in avoidance of everything is evil is the quota here. So Paul says in Romans 2, verse 13, For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

Now I know you can quote to me passages that Paul is going to give us later in chapter 3 and chapter 4 that talks about justification by faith. That's right. But you're getting ahead of the game.

You cannot forget that God has established righteousness as the standard to eternal life. And so Paul says, if you want eternal life, do all of the law. If you don't possess that kind of righteousness, you're damned.

This has always been the standard of grace. And grace doesn't remove that standard of righteousness. If we believe that grace removes the standard of righteousness, then surely we are antinomians.

We are people who do not and hate. We hate the law. We do not abide by it.

The Lord Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount said in Matthew 5.20, For I say unto you that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus makes it unequivocally clear. You're going to have to have a righteousness that exceeds even the most devout religious men.

Now just how righteous was a Pharisee? Well Jesus substantiates the external righteousness of Pharisees in a parable he told between the publican and the Pharisee. You remember the parable? Listen to what Jesus says about the righteousness of this man. He prays much, fasts twice a week, tithes on everything he owns, even his spice garden.

And in this parable he says, quoting the man, that he was not guilty of immorality or extortion. How does your righteousness compare to his? Do you pray much, fast twice a week? Do you tithe like that? And yet Jesus said that not even this kind of righteousness was enough to merit eternal life. You've got to exceed even that.

Grace does not remove righteousness and righteous living. Salvation is to be righteous as God is. The fourth implication is then therefore only one other thing we can say and that is eternal life is impossible to us.

If the Bible presents eternal life as being righteous as God is, then there's only one conclusion. We're all sunk. We're all in trouble.

Our righteousness may be commendable as far as men goes. You may applaud and laud one another, but as far as God is and that too is the standard of righteousness, we are in a deep, deep problem. So let me proceed to yet another fact from our text.

That is the declaration of God's justice. God will execute justice. Justice will not be forever delayed.

And so God responds to Jeremiah in verses 14 through 17. And he tells Jeremiah that he will bring justice to bear on Judah and her wicked neighbors. Jeremiah 12 and verse 14.

Thus says the Lord concerning all my wicked neighbors who strike at the inheritance with which I have endowed my people Israel. Behold, I'm about to uproot them from their land and will uproot the house of Judah from among them. And it will come about that after I have uprooted them, I will again have compassion on them.

And I will bring them back, each one to his inheritance and each one to his land. Then if they will really learn the ways of my people to swear by my name as the Lord lives. Even as they taught my people to swear by Baal, they will be built up in the midst of my people.

But if they will not listen, then I will uproot that nation, uproot and to destroy it, declares the Lord. So God here shares with Jeremiah his righteous intentions. He would judge Judah along with her wicked and idolatrous neighbors.

Yet in his justice, he again displays mercy. Look at verse 15. Let's read it again.

And it will come about that after I have uprooted them, I will again have compassion on them. And I will bring them back, each one to his inheritance and each one to his land. Our Lord dispenses justice and yet he can't do it without showing mercy.

It almost seems like judgment's a strange work to God. He dispenses judgment and then he feels sorry about it and reverses it. Now, I know that's not quite an accurate assessment, but it seems to me that the Bible teaches that God would rather forgive than execute his justice.

Ezekiel 18.32 Ezekiel 18.32 God says, For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God. Wherefore, turn yourselves and live ye. It seems to me from this verse that judgment is a strange work to God.

He appears to delight in showing mercy. Psalm 86 and verse 5. We get this analysis of God. For thou, O Lord, art good and ready to forgive, plenteous in mercy unto all them that call unto thee.

Again, David, Psalm 103, verse 8. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. But my favorite verse dealing with the mercy of God, I think, is from the prophet Micah in chapter 7 and verse 18. When the prophet says, Who is a godlike unto thee that pardoneth iniquity? And passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage.

He retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy. And so, Jeremiah's question is very relevant. And very close to the heart of God.

I think what Jeremiah is asking, chapter 12, verse 1. Lord, I know you're righteous, but when you dispense your judgment, you show mercy. Wasn't that the problem with the prophet Jonah? He had a message of righteousness. Repent.

He didn't say repent or perish. He said perish. Forty days God is going to destroy you, no ands, ifs or buts.

But even he knew that God was merciful. And so it seems to me that Jeremiah is struggling here. And he's saying, Lord, when will there be full and complete justice? I know you're righteous, but God, when will your justice be displayed? Well, Jeremiah, the truth is, God's justice was never fully and completely displayed

in the Old Testament.

You have to go to the New Testament. Just outside the city of Jerusalem, to a small hill called Calvary. And on the crest of that hill, there was the greatest display of the justice of God seen by men for angels.

And God pierced His own Son for sin. Paul, in Romans 3, verses 21-26, declares to us that in the death of God's Son is the full demonstration of righteous judgment. He shares the redeeming message of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I call this passage the heartbeat of the heart of the Gospel. He says in Romans 3, verses 21-22, that it's now possible for men to be considered righteous, just like God. And it's through Jesus our Lord.

He says, verse 21, But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets. Ah, there is a righteousness of God. It's now been made declared, shown to us.

The law and the prophets testified about it. What is this righteousness of God? Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe. The only hope of salvation is to have a righteousness that is the same as God's.

And it's been given to us, all of us who believe. But, how does God do this? Does He simply look the other way and ignore our sins? No. He's given us His righteousness not at the expense of His righteousness, but by its fulfillment and satisfaction.

Look at verse 24. Being justified freely by His grace. Oh, I don't have enough time tonight.

Mercy. And Paul is saying things here that are so radical that it almost would appear that God is unrighteous, when you stop and think about it, to give us no condemnation. The apostle is saying here that the Christian position with God is that He is justified.

We, the guilty, have been declared not guilty. That's what justification means. The word has often been defined to mean acquittal.

A man is accused of a crime, brought in, the evidence shows that there is not sufficient proof to convict him, and so he's acquitted, which means he didn't commit the crime. But there's a problem. We did.

We have lifted our high hand against God and His Kingdom. We are guilty. And God has said of the guilty, not guilty.

That is not justice. It's the very thing that the Bible says God cannot do. To look at a guilty man and say, go free.

But were it not for the words, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, we would be left with the idea that God is not righteous. God freely forgiving sinners is inexcusable unrighteous. But God says, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

What does that tell us about God's righteousness? Well, it tells us a great deal. These words tip the scale from God being viewed as unrighteous to be seen as righteous as He really and truly is. In other words, our redemption, now listen, our redemption is a just thing for God to do.

And the Apostle explains this in verses 25 and 26. He says that the cross is a declaration of God's righteousness. Now listen, for the majority of Christians, the cross is a demonstration of God's love for sinful man.

Nothing more. Now undoubtedly it is true that the Lord's death is the epitome of love. But it's so much more.

The death of Christ serves a judicial purpose as well as being a demonstration of God's amazing love. And to insist that the death of our Lord Jesus is simply a demonstration of God's love. Listen, it's dangerous to our justification.

And here's why. The cross loses its power to reconcile if it's simply a demonstration of love. There is no justification.

It would simply be God satisfying His attribute of mercy at the expense of His righteousness. And friends, nothing that is wicked or sinful can come into His presence and be joined with Him. There is no salvation if the cross is nothing more than a demonstration of the love of God.

And so the Apostle Paul takes us right into the heart of the Gospel. In verses 24, 25, and 26 of Romans 3. And he shows us what God's purpose was in having His Son put to death. In verse 25, Paul writes, Whom God set forth to be a propitiation.

God put His Son on display as a means of removing the wrath of God from the believing sinner. That's what the word propitiation means. It means that the anger and righteous judgment of God is put away.

It's appeased and put away from us. Now that is great love. But it also means a demonstration of righteousness.

And he spells it out clearly when he continues here in verse 25. To declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are passed through the forbearance of God. In other words, the Apostle Paul says that God put His Son on display on the cross in order to make a statement.

The statement is that He, God, is righteous. However, this righteous demonstration in verse 27 is not mentioned in connection with our sins being forgiven. In verse 25, it says nothing about your sins being forgiven.

It's about the sins of the Old Testament saints. Now Paul is not slipping mentally here. He's not forgetting about the New Testament saint.

He's got a point to make. And that is the cross is as much a demonstration of God's justice and righteousness as it is His love. How is it made here? Well, in the word remission to the sins that are passed.

The word remission simply means to pass over. Actually, the word carries the idea of being relaxed. So God, we could say, was lax in dealing with the sins of the Old Testament saints.

Instead of giving them what they deserved, He gave them mercy and pardon. Now this is radical truth. In other words, Paul is saying God has done exactly what has been argued He can't do.

Forgive the guilty without satisfying His justice. He ignored His justice. And He granted forgiveness to all who believed in Him.

From righteous Abel to John the Baptist, all of the Old Testament saints were shown mercy without the appeasing of the wrath of God. Without justice being served. Without judgment being executed.

Now you may argue and say, well, their sins were propitiated with all of the animal sacrifices they committed. But both Old and New Testament tells us that's impossible. The writer of Hebrews says for the blood of bulls and goats.

Impossible for the blood of bulls and goats that it should take away sin. And David, I love David. He was a man whose heart was in the New Covenant, but his body was trapped in the Old.

And when he had sinned against Bathsheba and he seeks God for forgiveness, what does he say? Lord, Thou desirest not sacrifice, for I would have given it. You don't delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.

A broken and a contrite heart. Oh God, Thou will not despise. Where did he get that? Animal sacrifices could only provide an external cleanliness.

In other words, all it could do was make the worshipper ceremonially clean to come into the tabernacle of the temple. At best, it could only cover his sins, not remove them. There's only one conclusion.

God justified or pardoned sinners by merely granting them mercy without dealing with their sins. Well, you may say God forgave them because He looked down time to the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Well, yes, He certainly did.

But that doesn't remove the fact that for millennia, justice was being delayed waiting for the fullness of time. It doesn't remove the fact that God appeared to be unrighteous in His dealings with all of those in the Old Testament. He was liable and open to accusations of unrighteousness.

Men could say He had a double standard. With some, He executed judgment. And with others, He showed leniency.

This is a result of the fact that God had forgiven men without justice being satisfied. Now, in Psalm 9, verse 16, we read, The Lord is known by the judgment which He executeth. In other words, you want to know what God, what He's like.

And again, I agree with our brother Paul. We can't really say God's like this because He's right. We're already wrong when we do.

But we can gain some insight into His character and His heart by the way He executes justice. You can know a whole lot about a judge by the way He renders judgment in His court. For example, let's say this evening that somebody breaks into your home and kills your family, loots your property.

And within hours after the hideous crime, they are captured and brought before a judge. And on that day of judgment, all of the evidence is presented to him. The DNA secures a conviction and the man even confesses it.

And the judge says, clearly, you are guilty. Even your confession says you are. But I'm a Christian.

And I want to be like my Heavenly Father. And so, I'm going to forgive you of your crimes and you are acquitted. And with that, the gavel drops and the man is set free.

How would you feel about that? I mean, how would you feel if that really took place? Every fiber of righteous indignation would scream, Scream injustice. And not only would you demand that the criminal be retried, you would demand the judge to be removed from the bench because he's proven not to be a good judge, but a wicked judge. Now, if we can make this determination about a human judge, isn't it possible that the same determination can be made of God, that His judgments reveal something about us? Do you believe that God can be just if He simply pardons the saint without dealing with his crime? David says that God is known by the justice He executes.

And yet, Paul is stating here that God demonstrated righteousness in the death of Jesus for sins that had not yet been dealt with. And so the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is now presented to us as the answer to the dilemma. Look at it.

Three times, Paul says, God is righteous. Look at this. We already stated the first one, verse 25.

Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood to declare His righteousness. The second statement of this demonstration is in verse 26, to declare, I say at this time, His righteousness. This is absolutely crucial to this apostle.

He has to drive the point home. This is the gospel. It's at stake.

So he says it yet again, verse 26, that he might be just and justifier of them which believe in Jesus. Three times, in one sentence, he says, The Lord died in order to vindicate the name of God and establish the righteousness of His person. So Jesus vindicated the sins of those in the Old Testament, just as was delayed but not foregone.

And all of God's anger towards all of those sins, committed David's sins, Abraham's sins, Noah's sins, were brought to bear on the Lord Jesus Christ, and clearly displayed between heaven and earth that God is righteous. He will not tolerate sin. He will judge it and smite it wherever He finds it.

Jesus received the blunt force of sin. The pent-up anger of God's justice was unleashed like a dam breaking. A tidal wave came and destroyed anything in its path.

And Christ was in its path. But dear friends, it's just not for the Old Testament saints. Thank God.

Verse 26 makes it clear that it's for us as well. Because he says, To those who believe in His name. Do you believe? Have you committed your heart in faith that Christ is sufficient to pay for the penalty of your sins? Then dear friends, you're included in the redeemed.

Justified. And everyone who believes upon Jesus receives mercy because Christ suffered the penalty of our sin. Well, there are a few applications that I would like to make in concluding.

What we are seeing here before us in the third chapter of Romans is that Jesus is the revelation of the righteousness of God. Jesus and His death and life is a demonstration of the fullness and the completeness of God's righteousness. And so the first application I would say to us tonight is that in the Lord Jesus Christ, we discover the knowing of how God views sin.

The death of Christ gives us God's attitudes towards sin. He hates it with an infinite hatred. If the Lord was going to spare in any regards to sin, would you not think He would have spared His own Son? Especially when He, with strong crying and tears, prayed unto Him who was able to save Him from death, but God spared not His own Son.

How can you sit there this evening and think that God considers you more special than His only begotten and He will give you special favor or treatment? He will not tolerate our sins. There has to be a sacrifice. And the sacrifice is appropriated by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And if you reject that sacrifice, there is nothing left but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and righteous indignation. The second application of Jesus being the righteousness of God is a sheer overwhelming awe and amazement at the mercy of God. You see, friends, if you don't understand the righteousness of God, you're going to have trouble with the mercy of God.

There are some who seem to be little astonished that grace was given to them. They almost have an entitlement mentality. That it was owed to them.

They deserved it. How sad it is when we take for granted our forgiveness. And I must confess to you that there are times when my heart is frosted.

It's cold towards God. And I've learned that when those times happen, I make myself meditate on the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. I think about His suffering in my stead.

I look upon Him there writhing in agony because of me. And little by little, the heart is warmed until there's a burning again. It's when we see the righteousness of God and the death of Christ, do we even understand the amazement of this thing called forgiveness.

How could this God have forgiven me? But lastly, the last application, and I'll close, is that when you behold the righteousness of God in the face of Jesus Christ, it creates a proper view of God's love. You see, God's love has to be viewed in the context of God's righteousness. The sinner should not assume that God's love is enough to overcome his sin.

Otherwise, repentance becomes trivial. I had a friend who was witnessing to the homeless. And he walked up to a homeless man and said, I'm here to tell you God loves you.

And the man simply smiled and said, yeah, I know God loves me. And with that, he lifted up his wine bottle and took another guzzle. Where did that come from? Why did he believe that? Because he'd been told that God is a loving God.

And God loves. How could a person who loves somebody see that person enter into torment? It doesn't make sense to him. It doesn't until he understands that this God's love for righteousness is as intense as His love is.

And the problem with much of our popular gospel preaching is we've simply said God is love and we've not put the backdrop of His righteousness. And people are praying and confessing and walking aisles, but they're leaving unchanged because they've never had to deal with their sin. You can't go to the cross and not deal with sin.

Because that's what God did at the cross. He dealt with our sin. And therefore, if God is righteous, then all those who follow after Him are righteous.

Just like He is. This is the theology of John. He says in 1 John 2, verse 29, If ye know that He is righteous, you know that everyone that doeth righteousness is born of Him.

This is not positional righteousness. Not justification. He says doeth righteousness.

Practices righteousness. The implication is clear. If you've been born again, you are walking in the light as He is walking in the light.

Oh, you're not perfect yet, and neither am I. Far from it. But there's a longing for such. We don't look at our sin and say, Oh, well, God understands.

We groan over it. We weep over it. We cry over it.

We're broken over it. Is that your heart? Can you look at the cross tonight and see what our Jesus has done to demonstrate the righteousness and the love of God and say, Oh, sin's not a big deal. I've made my peace with God.

I'm okay. But are you like those who have been to Calvary and experienced the reality of God's righteousness as well as His mercy and you've been forever changed and you can't abide by your sin anymore? Dear friend, there is coming a day when justice will not be delayed anymore. The dead will give up.

The sea will give up its dead. The graves will release its hold on the dead. And the sword of God will be unscathed, made bare, and none will escape but all those who have placed their faith in this righteous God who forgives and pardons and has found shelter under the righteous wings of the King, they shall go unscathed and unharmed.

Do you know this God? Do you know the shelter of His wings? The secret place of the Most High? Do you abide there? Are you content with a mere profession? And on that final day, all will say, all will say, saved and unsaved, angels and devils shall not the judge of all the earth do right. Yes, He will. Father, forgive us, O Lord, when we take our sins so lightly and misunderstand grace.

Lord, please, please pity Your children and cause us to see the righteousness that You are. Help us to see it in Jesus. Keep our eyes on Him, ever beholding Him, looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

And it's in His name we pray.

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