

## The Righteousness Which Is In Christ Jesus.

Text: Romans 3:10-24

Suggested Hymns:  
277, 364, 330, 327, 332

- 1) Our Own Lack Of Righteousness
- 2) God Prepared A Perfect Righteousness For Us  
Which Is Acceptable To Him.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Romans 3:10-24, <sup>10</sup> ... *“There is none righteous, no, not one; <sup>11</sup> There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. <sup>12</sup> They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.”*

<sup>13</sup> *“Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues they have practiced deceit”; “The poison of asps is under their lips”; <sup>14</sup> “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.” <sup>15</sup> “Their feet are swift to shed blood; <sup>16</sup> Destruction and misery are in their ways; <sup>17</sup> And the way of peace they have not known.”*

<sup>18</sup> *“There is no fear of God before their eyes.” <sup>19</sup> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

<sup>21</sup> *But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*  
(NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

God created man in His own *“image.”* This does not only mean that God made man a rational being with an immortal soul, as distinguished

from the animals, but that God made him holy, without sin, with the right disposition of his intellect and will, and with knowledge of God and divine things.

As a result, man enjoyed blessed communion with God. Furthermore, he was free of that dread enemy of our race — death; for “*death came through sin.*”<sup>1</sup> Created in the image of God unto life, full and blessed — this was man’s glory.

But this glory has departed. Man’s holiness is gone. His nature is utterly sinful. His knowledge of God and His will is darkened, and death now pursues his footsteps and stalks the world. Scripture says, *Death spread to all men, because all sinned.* Death, the terror of death, suffering, judgment — these now envelop man like a cloud.

Is the original glory irretrievably lost? Can man again be united with God? Can he regain life and immortality? Is there hope for him? The correct answers to these questions are essential to our happiness.

Yet we cannot find these answers in ourselves. Human philosophy cannot give them to us. These questions involve God’s will and relation to us; and it is evident that man cannot of himself know the mind and counsel of God. God must give us the information we so greatly need. This He has done.

We find the only sure answers to our questions in many parts of His Word. They are found in our text. If we read this properly, we shall be ready to inscribe over it, the cheering words of Isaiah 55:3: “*Hear, and your soul shall live.*” Yes, this declares to us *The Righteousness Which Avails Before God.*

The words of our text first cast us into the dust by uncovering our own lack of righteousness, but they then raise us up to life in God by offering us the perfect righteousness prepared for us by the Lord. Let us consider these thoughts in turn. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. Our Own Lack Of Righteousness**

Our own lack of righteousness before God is evident just as the Apostle says in our text, “*There is none righteous, no, not one.*” The reason for this declaration is, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* These words are not a cynical expression of contempt for man. The Bible is not a

cynical book. It does, however, deal with facts as they are. That is why it meets our needs.

The natural, or unregenerate, condition of man is not one of holiness, but of transgression and guilt. Our text indicates that he is without understanding in spiritual things; that he is estranged from God and does not seek after Him in His Word, where alone He is to be found.

Man does not walk in God's ways. Man has become unprofitable, i.e., worthless, so far as spiritual matters are concerned. This state of moral depravity is universal. *"There is none righteous, no, not one."*

As is to be expected and as history and experience show, this depravity shows itself especially in man's speech and actions. Natural man's speech is corrupt. The marvellous organs of speech which God gave him he often places in the service of sin.

The next verses set forth this fact in vivid language. The throat, instead of being a wellspring of wholesome discourse and of praise to the glorious Creator and Lord, is often like an open tomb, exhaling the noxious breath of corrupting and destructive thought.

The tongue, instead of speaking the truth, often serves as an instrument of deception and falsehood. The lips frequently pour forth the poison of malice and slander. The mouth is full of cursing and bitterness, of gross and ungodly speech.

Natural man's actions are corrupt. He is unable to do that which is good in the sight of God, for even those deeds which seem fair to the eyes of men are done without the disposition and motives which make them acceptable to God.

Often enough his deeds are shocking. In describing those in whom sin works itself out to its bitter end, our text says, *Their feet are swift to shed blood;* <sup>16</sup> *Destruction and misery are in their ways;* <sup>17</sup> *And the way of peace they have not known.* <sup>18</sup> *"There is no fear of God before their eyes."* Mankind, created to live in harmony and peace with their fellow men, often break through all restraints.

Ruthlessly they pursue their own selfish and sinful interests and designs, tramping upon all who might interfere with their aims. Without a qualm they

destroy the rights and privileges, the property and happiness, yes, the lives, of those who happen to be in their way. Is this picture overdrawn? Surely, no one who looks at the News today feels that it is!

This description of natural depravity depicts the true nature of the sin that is in all people, regenerate and unregenerate. If it does not express itself in the shocking speech and actions indicated above, it is merely because it is being held in restraint — in believers, by the grace of God. The grace of God operates through the Word and Sacrament and the new nature which this implants in us.

In the unregenerate restraint is exercised by man's natural knowledge of God's Law with its threats of punishment, by the voice of conscience, by the laws and conventions of society, or by some other force or consideration.

Finally, we ask: Do the words "There is none righteous" apply also to believers, who through faith are united with God, who keep the divine Law before their eyes and strive to conform to it also in inward thought? In believers the power and dominion of sin has been broken, thanks to the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit.

But sin has not yet been eradicated from our nature. It will be with us as long as we dwell here below; and where sin is, there is no inherent righteousness. Even the believers, then, are not righteous in themselves before God. We have sinned, and we continue to sin. Ours is an imputed righteousness.

Here is the bitter truth which casts us into the dust before our Creator and Lord. This truth we must learn; for only then shall we be ready to hear what our God, in His great mercy, has done to make it possible for our souls to live. Only then shall we be able to appreciate the true glory of the Lord's work of grace in our behalf.

## **2. God Prepared A Perfect Righteousness For Us Which Is Acceptable To Him.**

This is the glorious message conveyed to us in the following words of our text, <sup>21</sup> *But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,* <sup>22</sup> *even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no*

*difference; <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

The all-important truth that the righteousness which we need has been prepared for us by God is found in the words *“the righteousness of God”* and in the amplified expression *the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ*. This second expression shows clearly that *“the righteousness of God”* spoken of here is not to be thought of as a righteous quality in God, as Roman Catholic theology teaches, nor as a state of holiness which must be in us before God can accept or justify us. Merely to be told that God is righteous or that we must be righteous cannot help us.

In our sinful condition such thoughts can only plunge us into despair, as Luther experienced. Thank God, the righteousness spoken of here is something which comes from God. It is something which in His infinite grace and mercy He has prepared for us *“by Jesus Christ,”* or *“through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”* — through Christ’s fulfilment of the divine Law in our stead and through His bearing of the guilt and punishment of our sin. Since God Himself has prepared this for us, we know that it is acceptable to Him, and that it avails in His sight.

All people must have this righteousness if they are to be saved. For this reason God took pains to reveal it as soon as man became a sinner. The very first Gospel promise, given to Adam and Eve after the Fall, directed their thoughts and hopes to the coming Saviour, who was to establish this righteousness.

Thereafter God “witnessed” concerning it in the writings of Moses and of the Prophets<sup>2</sup> and through the sacrifices and types of the Old Testament worship and sacrifices.

But the fullest and clearest revelation of it God gave later through Christ, the Light of the world, and through the Apostles, whom Christ instructed and endowed with the Spirit of Truth for the writing of the New Testament.

How can we obtain this righteousness? If God had not given us a clear answer to this important question, we would still not be able to find rest for our souls. But He has not left us in doubt. In our text we are told that this is a righteousness *“which is through faith in Jesus Christ.”*

This means that it is made ours by faith in the Saviour and His redemption. By believing the Gospel, in which God offers us forgiveness in Christ freely by grace, we are declared righteous in the sight of God. Here is true and abiding comfort for the sinner whose conscience accuses him!

It reminds us of the great words in Ephesians 2:8-9, <sup>8</sup> *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Few people have experienced as deeply as did Luther how precious this doctrine is to the troubled sinner. He tells us that when God in His mercy gave him the correct understanding of it, he felt himself *“newly born and in Paradise.”*

All who believe in the redemption of Jesus Christ are reunited with God. The image of God, lost by sin, is restored in us. For in Christ we are holy in God’s sight; through the Scriptures the knowledge of God and of His will, especially of His gracious will, is imparted to us.

In Christ we are given the promise of life; in gratitude we earnestly strive to walk in the way of God’s commandments. True, as long as we dwell here below, the image is imperfect, because in weakness we still sin. But in eternal life it will be fully restored in us.

There we will know God even as we are known. There we will be clothed with righteousness and glory. There we will serve God with all our powers. In our bliss we will join the angelic host in singing: *“Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”*<sup>3</sup> Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:12

<sup>2</sup> Verse 21

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 5:13