The Greatest of These

Salvation: God's Love Received

Romans 3:21-26

Slide highlighted

Introduction: Two weeks ago we started our current series *The Greatest of These* which is taken from 1 Corinthians 13 – Paul tells us there that the "greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13). We saw that to love God is a divine expectation that is impossible for us to keep. He commands that we love Him with everything, even parts of us (heart, soul, mind) that we have no control over. Through the new birth, God makes those who were dead to Him, alive to Him. We looked at Zacchaeus as an example of this. God's Powerful, transforming love broke through every obstacle to reach Zacchaeus through a simple invitation. ***He first received God's love, and was changed by it, and then was willing to supply God's love to others.***

This morning I want to answer two questions:

1) **What is the Greatest Display of God's love?** If we could have a conversation with God, and were to ask Him, "God, what is the greatest demonstration of your love for me?" How would God answer?
2) **If God is a God of love and grace, what about Him being a God of wrath and Justice**? There is so much evil in the world! There is so much pain, hatred, and evil. Mankind's default is NOT to do good. Look at history, and you will see that we have committed the most heinous of crimes. And worst of all, we have blasphemed the God who created us. We have committed high treason against the King of the Universe. How can God be just and righteous and furiously angry towards sin, while at the same time forgive and love – those who stiff-arm God, those who are the cause of all manner of evil in this life. Do you see the problem there?

To answer these questions, the best place to go in Scripture is the greatest book, the greatest letter of all time – Romans. In Romans, Paul the apostle writes a massive treatise arguing that it's the Cross of Jesus Christ, where the justice and wrath of God is satisfied, and the forgiveness and love of God freely given. If you want to know that God is just…look to the Cross and you will see His Justice most aptly displayed. If you want to see that God is a God of wrath, look to the Cross and you will see wrath poured out. If you want to see that God is a forgiving God, look to the Cross where forgiveness for our sins is made possible. If you want to see that God is love, look to the Cross where you'll find the Greatest Display in all eternity of Love.

I want to ask for your forgiveness that the titles are mixed up for my next two sermons. I was going to originally preach one sermon on Assurance, but I decided that the information was too dense and way too important to do in one sermon….so I've broken up my original sermon into two sermons:

- This week, the title of my sermon is "Salvation: God's Love Received"
- Next week, the title of my sermon is "Assurance: God's Love Received and Enjoyed"

Both of these sermons will be from the book of Romans

Thinking Caps: Romans is NOT an easy book. But once you get the message, it's glorious! The display of God's love and the great peace and assurance and enjoyment in God that it will bring is incalculable. But it will take some effort on your part. For some of you, this is review in your Christian walk…and you can glory once again in the riches of the gospel. For some of you, this is new material. I'm asking for you to put your thinking caps on. If you rake the book of Romans, you will get leaves…if you dig down deep, you will get gold and you will build strong roots.

Justification, Justice, Wrath, and Grace: Before we look at our text, I want to give you some definitions of terms that you will see in the text.

- **Justification "Righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη)** – In Romans, the word Justification is used several times. It is often translated "righteousness". Sometimes it is used of our righteousness, or lack of righteousness. Sometimes it is used of God's righteousness. In Romans, it speaks of God's divine expectation for moral purity and uprightness. When God's creatures live up to this standard, they are declared by God as "righteous" or "Justified". When they do not, they are "unrighteous".
- **Justice** – There are times when "justification" is being used to speak of God's justice and the need for His justice to be carried out. God is perfect in righteousness. He is perfectly moral, upright. He is perfect in His attributes – His love, His holiness, His power, His goodness…etc. And He is perfect in JUSTICE. Because God is perfect in Justice, He must punish "unrighteousness". He must punish the breaking of His divine expectation – SIN. Sin is, basically, the breaking of God's divine expectation. But more than that, it is the moral quality of the individual who sins – SINFUL or SINNERS. God not only looks at our deeds to meet His divine expectation, He looks at the inner quality that also must meet His divine expectation. As we've talked about…that inner man, inner woman is dead spiritually, and given over to all manner of sin and evil. We don't have to be taught to be evil, we have to be taught to do good! God is JUST and He must carry out punishment for our inner and outer sinfulness and sins.
- **Wrath** – Also, because God is "Righteous" and perfect in every way. He MUST BE ANGRY towards our sin, towards our evil. For God to be indifferent, or anything less than FURIOUS towards sin, would make Him "unrighteous". The Bible calls this "*wrath*". If you can imagine someone, who is furious, burning with anger, and then consider that this is God Almighty, who created the universe by simply speaking…and all of the power that He possesses…and then think of Him as furiously burning with anger…you begin to get a sense of what the Bible describes as God's wrath. It's not a wrath that is sinful, or out of control like we often get when we are angry. It's not a sinful anger, it's a perfect, holy, just, hot, burning, powerful anger from God Almighty, towards sin and towards sinners.
    - ***Romans 1:18 – "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth."***
        - God's wrath is against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men…
        - …because we suppress God's truth. That He exists, that He has a standard for us which we break, and we stiff-arm God, we worship other things than God, we become foolish in our thoughts, our hearts become darkened, and we fall into all manner of sin and wickedness:

- ***Romans 1:29-31 – "…unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, [30] slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, [31] foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.***
- ***Romans 2:1 – "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things."***
    - **Paul leaves no room for anyone to claim they are not guilty**…even those who judge and look down on others who do these things are guilty as well – you "*practice the very same things*".
- By the end of this section in Romans, Paul charges the whole world as under sin and under the wrath of God
- ***Romans 3:9-12 – "For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, [10] as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; [11] no one understands; no one seeks for God. [12] All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."***
    - **Do you see the sweeping statement here?** ALL…Jews and Greeks (he is saying everyone Jewish and non-Jewish – that means everyone)…ALL UNDER SIN. NONE RIGHTEOUS (none justified)…all become worthless…none good…NOT EVEN ONE.

- Ok church, have a good day today and enjoy your week!
- This is a very hard message to hear, and we don't like to hear it! We want to hear that we're good! And we love to compare ourselves with one another or others who are worse than us. But God DOES NOT GRADE ON A CURVE! He measures by HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS…His divine expectation/standard…a standard that is impossible for us to keep…indeed we've already failed before we try.
- This leads many to simply say, "Why did God make me like this?" That's another problem Paul deals with in Romans later on…but suffice it to say here, "Who are you to reply against God!" He is God and He sets the standard and you've fallen short of it. You can try to argue against it all you want to…you will get nowhere with that. Before charging God will folly, can you not remember so many times in your life when you knew the right thing to do and you failed to do it!
    - Robert DeNiro was quoted by someone as saying, "If I ever stand before God, I'll have a few questions to ask of Him." NO Bobby…you won't! You will FALL ON YOUR FACE TREMBLING BEFORE A HOLY GOD AND YOU WILL GIVE AN ACCOUNT TO HIM! We DO NOT need an explanation from God…what we need is MERCY! MERCY FROM GOD!
- **Summary**: God is Righteous, He has set His divine standard of righteousness. We have all fallen short of that standard. God is just and God hates sin and will bring divine retribution on sin. If there is one ounce within you that scoffs at what I've said, "common Brian, GET REAL!" …PLEASE, I PLEA WITH YOU…do not play games with God. Your life right now is walking on a thin tight rope, able to fall off at any moment, with God's furious flames of anger burning underneath you in a place called hell where you will go for all eternity if you were to die today apart from God forgiving you, giving you mercy, giving you grace. THAT'S AS REAL AS REAL CAN GET!

- **Justice and our Justifying God**: What kind of punishment would you expect from a God who is perfect and eternal. The greater the crime, the greater the punishment right? In order for God to be just and righteous, He must punish us our crimes against Him in a way that balances the scales. An eternal crime against an eternal God, demands an eternal punishment.

God has satisfied His wrath and justice by punishing your eternal crimes upon the eternal Son of God who died in your place for the punishment that you deserve. You can either receive, by faith, His payment on your behalf, or you can face God one day and suffer the penalty yourself.

- **Grace and Justification**: This is where we now come to this glorious word, "grace". Grace is God's undeserved favor. In Romans, it is seen by God's undeserved favor in sending His Son Jesus as a gift to meet and satisfy His divine expectation for justice and righteousness on your behalf.

Now we're ready to see God's display of love in our text:

Romans 3:21 - "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it"

- **"But now"** creates a massive shift in the book of Romans. Rom. 1-3 Paul revealed the wrath of God and our guilt and sin. NOW Paul is moving into the glorious good news. How God maintains His righteous standard, meets His just requirement/payment, appeases His wrath, and demonstrates His love and grace – all through the cross.
- **Notice God's "righteousness"** in this text speaks of His way of making us righteous…and it is **"apart from the law".** The law of Moses (OT) was not intended to make us righteous, it was to show in written form God's divine expectation. In fact, the law "stops the mouths" of anyone who says he is not guilty…because it shows exactly where you have been guilty!
    - Have you ever lied? Have you ever coveted someone else's possessions? Have you ever worshipped anything greater than God? These are just a few things we're ALL guilty of!
- Notice **"the law and prophets bear witness to it"** – speaking of this plan of "making us righteous"…the OT (law, prophets) promised it would come. The OT foretells the coming Messiah who will "Justify", or "make righteous" those who trust in Him.

Romans 3:22-24 – "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus"

- **"All have sinned"** - all are guilty, there is no distinction – God doesn't grade on a curve – all of us GUILTY before God.
- **We are justified – "made righteous**" by His grace (undeserved favor) ***"as a gift***".

    - "to justify" – verbal form. Justification is "righteousness"…to justify is "to make one righteous". It's a declaration over your life. A judicial sentence – not guilty, justified, righteous because of Jesus.
- **We are redeemed** – saved from wrath to come. Saved from our lives of sin. One day to be received by God with a clean bill of health.
- **"Through faith in Jesus Christ"** – faith is the means by which God connects us to Christ. When you trust in Jesus – when you surrender to Him – His payment satisfies the justice and wrath of God. Also, His perfect, righteous life is "accredited" to you. It's called "substitution" (think substitute teacher or advocate). Someone who stands in the place of another.

God on that day, when Jesus was crucified, treated Him as though He lived your life…so that on this day, God treats YOU as though You lived His life.

- Notice that this "righteousness" given to me as a "gift" HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH MY WORKS, MERIT, OR EARNING OF THE GIFT.
- God, by grace, connects me to, puts me in union with Jesus.
- **Diner check**: Imagine if I went to breakfast with Warren Buffett. But I was totally broke, no money in the bank. At the end of the meal Warren tells me he'll pay the bill…but I insist on paying! I have insufficient funds…I can't pay for my meal…and when I try to do that it frustrates Warren who wants to pay for me and has limitless funds to do so. How much more does it frustrate God who says that I cannot earn or pay for His free gift of grace given to me through Jesus! Salvation cannot be purchased or worked for, it is given to you as a gift through Jesus.

Let's read the last two verses and we'll conclude…

Romans 3:25-26 - Whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. [26] ***It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."***

- ***"*propitiation"** simply means, to *appease* or *satisfy* the wrath of God…it's the blood of Jesus, the perfect sacrifice for sin, that appeases the wrath of God.
- **God in the OT overlooked the sins of the people**…He made atonement through the blood sacrifice of an animal, but it could never take away sin or appease the wrath of God. So was God then unjust? For God to simply "pass over sin" seems to make God unjust!
    - David commits adultery with Bathsheba, has Uriah, her husband murdered, and then God just forgives him?!
- **"This was to show God's righteousness, because in His forebearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show His righteousness at the present time" –** God was able to overlook the sins of David and others because He looked forward to the sacrifice of the Messiah, whom they trusted in and hoped for, who would die for sin.
- **"so that He might be just and justifier" –** God is just in punishing sin, the eternal crime against God is satisfied by the eternal Son of God who took the punishment. God's righteousness and justice are upheld in punishing sin. God is the Justifier, by punishing sin on Jesus.

In Summary:

The eternal WRATH of God that was towards us because of the JUSTICE of God, has been appeased through the eternal SON of God, who God put forth as a sacrifice for sin as a display of the LOVE of God unto the GLORY of God.

The cross of Jesus is where the divine expectation of God and the punishment for our breaking that expectation meet. The cross is where we see the wrath of God, and where we see the love of God displayed. So many people today want to do away with God's wrath…and in doing so you cripple and dilute the greatest display of His love. God's anger towards sin and His love for you moved Him to do something about it…so that He might be Just in punishing sin, and the one who Justifies sinners…to the praise of His grace, love, and glory.

Three things as we close:

- **Do not dilute grace with works** – Grace is a gift, you cannot earn it. You do not have the funds to pay the check. One ounce of work or something you do or penance you offer…anytime you say "faith in Jesus PLUS" You distort the grace of God
    - ***Rom. 4:4-5 – "Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. [5] And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness"***
        - If you could earn righteousness, God would be a debtor to you. He will be a debtor to no man. God wouldn't receive the glory, you would receive the glory for what you've done to earn righteousness.
    - Let God pay the check for you…and spend the rest of your life praising Him for it.
- **Do not cheapen grace with sin** – God's gracious gift does not give you license to go on sinning. See what your sin cost the Savior on the Cross. When you put your faith in Christ, God not only forgives you for your sin, He begins to change you from the inside out.
    - ***Romans 6:1-2 – "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? [2] By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?"***
    - When you continue to live in sin, you cheapen what Christ has done for you on the cross. Someone who has truly put their faith in Jesus lives in constant obedience and dependence on Him.
- **Receive grace and surrender your life to the glory of God** – If you haven't yet put your faith in Jesus do that now.