

Words of Life

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[0 : 00] Open your Bibles up to Romans chapter 3.

We are sort of jumping in in the middle of a paragraph. In fact, in the middle of a verse this morning. We are going to jump in at the end of verse 22 and then move on to verses 23, 24.

But all of these verses are in the middle of what is probably my favorite paragraph in the entire New Testament. Now, I know that's saying a lot.

There's so much depth and richness throughout the writings of Scripture. But this paragraph, for me, has been so formative of my understanding of what Christ has done for me, for us, for His Bride.

It's been so influential in my thinking. And I think that it ought to be influential in all of our thinking. It's a special paragraph. And so we're going to jump in in the middle. And I want you guys to stand as we began at the end of verse 22 and read down through the middle of verse 25.

[1 : 11] Paul writes, For there is no distinction. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith.

Now, Father, will you please bless our time in your word? We pray in Christ's name. Amen. You guys take a seat. There are certain words that we use frequently that sometimes we take for granted.

And there are certain words in Scripture that oftentimes we, sometimes in the church, we use them so often that we forget their meaning or we don't think about their meaning.

Or at times there are some words that we've not invested the time or the thought in to understand. And so we begin to use those words less and less. Biblical vocabulary that's needed to express biblical truth.

And yet sometimes we let that vocabulary sort of fall to the wayside. And this morning, in this passage, there are three terms that I think are absolutely essential for us to have a more complete understanding of what it means to be saved.

[2 : 29] To understand what Christ has actually done for us. Because the thing about words are, is that words are precious things. And yet we lose them more frequently than we lose almost anything else.

One thing you can do, if you'll go back and read older books, and you don't have to go back that far, but if you'll read books written in previous generations, you'll come across phrases and words all the time that you're either not quite sure of what those phrases mean because you've never seen them before, or as you're reading, it becomes pretty clear that they're not using this word in the same way that you normally use this word.

So I thought this week, I thought, I wonder what words have fallen out of use just in, say, the last hundred years. And so I backed up a little bit less than a hundred years, and I just wanted to kind of look up and see some of the slang from the 1920s.

What were some common phrases and words in use in the 1920s that we either don't use anymore, or we don't use often, or we just find them funny, when then they weren't really funny at all, they were in normal use.

I've heard the term before, the bee's knees. That's the bee's knees. That's something really good. And I've always thought of it as a funny saying, but apparently it was not really a joking saying. It was something really used by people all the time.

[3 : 46] Or how about the word, I never realized that the word jack could refer just to money in general. But in the 1920s, if you're talking to a young person, and they said they had some jack, they're probably talking about money.

I guess that's maybe where we get the word jackpot. I really don't know. Or the word Jake. Jake can mean everything's okay. Everything's just Jake. Everything's okay. I mean, just some strange words that we don't really, we don't use anymore, because language just sort of is constantly evolving and changing.

I mean, we've all struggled. You remember in junior high school, you struggled to read through Shakespeare. Why? Are the stories that complicated? Not really. When you summarize them, they're not that complicated at all.

It's the language that he's using that we're not accustomed to. It's still technically English, but it's still different from the English that we use. But sometimes, as languages change, we simply lose words because we get new words in their place.

There are times, though, that there are words that are indispensable. There are certain concepts. There are certain things that we need to express. And if you abandon certain language, you don't have a clear way to express those things.

[4 : 56] You just don't have a good way to say it. Imagine trying to describe a football game to someone and explain to them the rules of football without using the words touchdown, pass, running back, or quarterback.

How would you explain football without those words? You would have to invent new words that meant the exact same thing as those words. I don't even know where we got all that terminology from.

I was doing a wedding a few weeks ago, actually a couple of months ago. And there was a young girl, a teenager, who was going to be playing music. It was a small wedding. She was the only instrumentalist. She was going to be playing some music, sort of as an intro as the bride walked down.

And she wanted to know, should she just play it? How many times should she play it? And I said, well, how long is it? I mean, how long is the song? And she starts telling me about, I don't know, measures and things and things that I really, I can't even remember everything.

And she's in the middle of explaining it to me and holding up her sheet music to me. And I said, wait, just a minute. Is it 30 seconds or is it a minute? Because you just spoke Chinese to me.

[5 : 57] I have no idea what you just said. And she was confused because she's a teenager. She's been doing music since she was a little kid. She didn't know how else to tell me how long the song is. Just she couldn't express it any other way.

There are some areas of life that we have terminology that we use that without that terminology, we're at a loss to express ourselves. And there are three words in this paragraph.

We're going to spend at least another week on this paragraph. But there are three words in the verses that we read this morning that I think are really indispensable to understanding the doctrine of salvation.

What the Apostle Paul is writing this entire book about. What he's talking about in this book. And you can see them pretty clearly there. And all I want us to do this morning is to try to understand these terms in their context and to know what they mean so that as we approach the rest of the paragraph next week, we'll be well equipped to do that.

So take a look down at verse 24. In verse 24, the Apostle Paul says that we are justified by God's grace as a gift. Justified.

[6 : 59] What does he mean by that? We'll see in a moment. And then he says also in verse 24 that we have received redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Redemption. And then lastly, he uses a word in verse 25 that's probably the strangest of the three.

And that is the word propitiation. God put forward Christ as a propitiation by his blood. Paul borrows each of these words from a different sort of aspect of life.

So he borrows justified and justification from the legal realm. That's the language of the courtroom. And then he uses this word about redemption. He borrows that from the marketplace.

And then finally, he gets this word propitiation, which I believe in the NIV is atoning sacrifice. But this great word propitiation, he borrows that from the temple language, from the priestly type of language that would have been used in both the Jewish temple and pagan temples to describe sacrifices that were often made.

And the people of the Greco-Roman world would have been somewhat familiar with this terminology. But Paul fills each of these words with distinctly Christian meaning that we're going to do our best to try to understand.

[8 : 07] But you can't really understand where Paul's coming from. You can't understand why do we need to be justified? Why do we need to be redeemed? Why do we need to be propitiated?

Why is that necessary? If you cut these verses loose from the previous verses. In fact, verse 23 serves as sort of a summary of what Paul has said earlier in chapters 1, 2, and the first half of chapter 3.

He says that there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The word all in verse 23 means all people without any sort of distinction at all.

That's why the end of verse 22 says there is no distinction. What Paul has specifically in mind here is the divide between Jew and Gentile. Because that's what he's had in mind throughout chapters 1, 2, and 3.

He labored in chapter 1 to show the sinfulness of the Gentiles. In chapter 2, he labored to show the sinfulness of the Jewish people. And then in chapter 3, he summed all that up as he quoted all those great passages from the Old Testament in verses 10 through 18 that we covered a few weeks ago.

[9 : 16] And so Paul has been demonstrating and showing from argument and from the Old Testament that all, both Gentiles and Jews, are sinners. And to be a sinner is, in essence, to have fallen short of giving God the glory that He deserves.

That's what it means to sin. Sinning is more than simply breaking a rule or breaking a law. The word transgression refers more specifically to breaking one of God's laws.

But the word sin is broader than that. Sin is anything that we do that does not bring to God the glory and honor that He rightly deserves.

So that it is entirely possible to do things that are outwardly, on the surface, good. They are good things. So that you can feed the poor. You can take care of the homeless.

You can raise your children well. You can be kind to people around you. You can be the best neighbor in your neighborhood. You can do a lot of things that are, on the surface, really good things to do that we ought to be doing.

[10 : 18] And yet you can do all of those things from a motive that does not aim at the glory of God. And so even in those good things, sin is often manifested. Sin is more than breaking rules.

Sin is more than a failure to live up to external standards. Sin has to do with our hearts. And Paul says, in terms of a heart, no difference between Jew and Gentile.

All of sin, that is, all have fallen short of giving God the glory that rightly belongs to Him. And that creates a problem for us because God is fully committed and fully devoted in all that He does to upholding and preserving the honor and glory of His name.

Which is why sin makes God angry. I have referred back more times now that I can count to Romans chapter 1 verse 18.

Because it is so foundational to what we are looking at throughout these chapters. Where Paul says in verse 18 that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

[11 : 26] All people, both Jew and Gentile alike, all of us stand under the wrath of God because we have failed to give to God the glory that He rightly deserves.

And now Paul is going to tell us that the solution to that problem, to the problem of sin, is the same. Just as there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile in sinfulness, so there is no distinction between how Jew and Gentile remedy the problem of sin.

All of sin, without distinction, Jew and Gentile have fallen short of the glory of God. And all are justified in the same way.

So let's talk first about this word justified. It is a word that is borrowed from the courtroom. And it means simply to be declared righteous by someone.

And we have talked about this in a couple of other sermons in Romans. Because you just can't get through Romans. You can't get through very many paragraphs in this book without having to stop and talk about what it means to be justified.

[12 : 31] Or what the word justification means. And I've said now, I don't know, probably four or five times throughout this sermon series, that to be justified is to be declared to be righteous by God.

It is not to be made righteous by God. That's different. The Bible uses a term for that called sanctification, in which God makes us holy progressively throughout our lives.

But to be justified is to be declared to be righteous. To be said to be righteous by the judge. That's the picture. It is the picture of God on judgment day, not counting our sinfulness against us, but instead treating us as if we had never sinned.

And not only as if we had never sinned, but if we had done all the righteous things required of us. It is God treating us who have fallen short of the glory of God, as if we have done all things for His glory, and honored Him in every aspect of our lives.

That's what it means to be justified by God. We receive a verdict about ourselves. You are righteous. That is not actually true about us.

[13 : 43] It reminds me oftentimes, I read sometimes about, especially various celebrities who receive these honorary doctorates from universities. And so they'll give a commencement speech at a university, and they're introduced as Dr. So-and-so.

And everyone knows, because it's an honorary doctorate, that they didn't actually go through all the coursework. They didn't spend years studying and writing a dissertation in order to earn that doctorate.

They received it because they're famous. Because they have a name. And because the university wants to honor other things that they've done. But in reality, they haven't technically earned a doctorate.

They've just earned the title of doctor. And that's the world of difference between the two. And justification is somewhat like that. We haven't earned the title of righteous.

God gives it to us. But even that is a flawed analogy. Because the celebrity has done something in order to attain the status of doctor. I mean, they've become famous.

[14 : 45] They've put out records, or hit records, or they've been in great movies, or they've won all sorts of awards in their area. So they've done something that would cause the university to say, hey, let's give this person an honorary doctorate.

But for us, for those who are justified by God, there's nothing that we've done. Absolutely nothing. That's why there's such a strong emphasis in this passage on the freedom of justification.

Notice what he says. All are justified by His grace as a gift. He uses two words to stress that this verdict of righteousness is not by anything that we have done.

It is by God's grace. That is, it is the complete opposite of having earned it. If you earn something, you deserve it. It's owed to you. But if something is given to you by grace, it's entirely not owed to you.

It is free to you. Which is the second term that Paul uses. He gives it to us as a gift, or freely. We are justified not on the basis of anything at all that we do.

[15 : 52] So maybe a better analogy than the honorary doctorate would be perhaps a, we'll say a professional athlete who works hard their entire career, who gains all the accolades, who is the greatest at the sport that they play.

And yet, rather than their name in the record books, they scribble in your name in the record books. Rather than their name on a placard in the Hall of Fame, your name is on the placard in the Hall of Fame.

And you've done nothing. You've not broken a record. You've never gotten a hit. You've never made a touchdown. You've not done anything to have your name written in that place.

And that's the picture of what God has done in justifying us. He declares us to be righteous freely by His grace, not based upon anything that we do.

And the question becomes, how does He do that? How can God simply declare us to be righteous people when we're the opposite of righteous?

[17 : 03] We're sinful. How can He treat us as if we've done everything for His glory when in all that we've done, we have fought against His glory? We have failed to glorify Him.

How can God do that? And there are a number of theologians who've criticized this doctrine of justification. They said, that's a legal fiction. It's not true. That involves God in some sort of lie.

And so Paul takes great pains throughout the rest of this paragraph to explain exactly how it is that the just judge can remain just and declare as just those who are unjust.

And we'll spend a good part of next week talking about that. But I want us to just take a look at the next two words here that will help us to begin to understand how that happens.

Because Paul says that our justification comes through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. So justification comes through something else.

[18 : 04] Something else happens that allows God, the just judge, to be able to declare unjust sinners just. It allows Him to do that. And one of the words used for that is this term redemption.

Ransom. Now, oftentimes there's a similar word based on the same root used in the New Testament that we use the word ransom. So Jesus says in the Gospels that the Son of Man, referring to Himself, came to give His life as a ransom for many.

Because to redeem something or to ransom something means to pay a price to gain the freedom of that object or person. In fact, this exact word that's here in our passage was often used to refer to someone who would pay the price for a slave to buy them out of slavery.

Paying a price to ensure their freedom. No longer is that person a slave to this person over here. No longer are they legally regarded by the Roman government or any local authorities as being a slave.

But they have been redeemed. They have been genuinely set free. The ransom has been paid for them. And that's the term that Paul borrows here from the marketplace.

[19 : 17] He borrows this term to help us to see that God doesn't simply, out of the blue, say, well, I think I'll say that you are righteous. No. Paul says a great price has been paid to enable God to make that legal declaration.

That statement is not made without cost to God. It is made without cost to us. It is free for us. It is by grace for us. But it is made at great cost for Him.

He has redeemed us. And what has He redeemed us from? Most often, this word group, redemption, ransom, and to be redeemed or ransom, most often these terms are used throughout the New Testament in connection with sin.

So that we are redeemed from sin. Redeemed from the power of sin. Oftentimes stated specifically by the blood of Christ.

So when God buys our freedom, when He pays the price for our freedom, He is buying us from freedom from sin. We were once enslaved to sin, and yet now we have been set free from sin.

[20 : 33] In fact, I want you to turn over a page or two in your Bible to Romans chapter 6, where Paul speaks of sin as a master, as an enslaving force.

He says, for instance, in verse 20, just to choose one of several. He says in verse 20, When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.

Verse 22. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and it's in eternal life.

So that we were, in a very real sense, we were enslaved to sin. Sin was at work within our hearts, directing all that we've done, and not only directing all that we do, but determining our ultimate end. Sin guaranteed our condemnation. And we were slaves, owned, bought and paid for, by sin. And now the Apostle Paul comes along and says, Though we have all sinned, and though all of us have fallen short of the glory of God, God will set us free from our slavery, not only to sin, but to the verdict that comes because of our sinfulness.

[21 : 51] He has set us free by paying a very high price for us. He has redeemed us. And that price? The very life of His Son.

Notice. We are justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. So redemption is in Him, through Him, by Him.

And here's how it happens. Christ, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood to be received by faith.

So now we've moved from the courtroom to the marketplace, and now finally into the temple, into the language of the cult. Now, Christ has been put forward by God Himself as a propitiation.

So what is a propitiation? That's not a word that we use very often. It's a word that many English translations have decided to drop, because we don't use it every day, and yet it's a word that I think that we need in our vocabulary as Christians.

[22 : 57] Propitiation. A propitiation is, essentially, a sacrifice that absorbs and removes wrath.

That's what a propitiation is. It is a sacrifice that absorbs and removes wrath. So that the pagans of Paul's day would use this terminology frequently, because they needed to appease the wrath of their local gods, who might be mad at them about any number of things, and so they would bring all sorts of sacrifices to the temples.

But it wasn't just a pagan term. It was a term that was familiar to Israel. It was a term that was in usage among God's people. Because in the temple in Jerusalem, routinely, year after year,

sacrifices were brought.

And those sacrifices were sacrifices primarily made for the sins of the people. To turn away and to avert God's wrath, so that the people themselves would not receive what they themselves deserve. And now Paul says, if our problem is wrath, and it is because we are sinners, that problem has been solved, because God has sent His own Son to be a sacrifice, to receive His own wrath upon Himself.

[24 : 19] The cross becomes the focal point, the locus of redemption, where God's wrath, that ought to be directed at us, is instead directed at His own Son.

Notice the language. God put forward Jesus as a propitiation by His blood. That is, by His death itself, Jesus has become the wrath-absorbing sacrifice that we need.

So God is fully just and able to declare us righteous in His court, because we are no longer slaves of sin, and a price has been paid to set us free from the power and penalty of sin.

And that price is the very life of Christ Himself, who pays the price by taking upon Himself the wrath of God that we deserve.

This is very much the gospel in a nutshell. This is the gospel in summary. God declares sinners to be just because Christ takes their place, absorbing the wrath that they deserve, and having already in His life performed all the righteousness that they need.

[25 : 44] Go back to the beginning of this paragraph. These are the last two verses that we read last week, verses 21 and 22, where Paul tells us that now, the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, that is, apart from our good works.

Although the law and the prophets bear witness to it. The righteousness of God, through faith, in Jesus Christ, for all who believe. This is justification again.

Righteousness now comes to us, not through obedience to the law, but through faith in Christ, which connects us again with verse 24 and 25.

We are justified by His grace as a gift, through redemption that is in Christ, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood to be received. How? How do you receive the benefits of Christ's death?

How do you receive the benefits of His wrath-absorbing death? How can you have His life count as a payment for your freedom? The answer is, to be received by faith.

[26 : 48] This is where Paul began, all the way back in chapter 1, where Paul gives his thesis for this entire book, in verses 16 and 17.

He tells us that he's going to proclaim the gospel, but he tells us what the gospel is mainly about. Romans chapter 1, verse 16, Paul says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For in the gospel, the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.

All of this happens by faith. You get declared righteous by faith in Jesus, because your faith unites you to Christ, and His righteousness now becomes your righteousness in God's eyes.

You get redeemed by faith, because when you trust in Jesus, He becomes the payment to set you free from sin. And your sins are propitiated by faith in Christ, because the union that you have with Christ by faith, enables you to not only receive His righteousness, but it also enables Him to take the penalty for your sinfulness.

[28 : 05] All of this happens by faith in Christ. And without this language that Paul uses, we will find it very, very difficult to appreciate what Christ has done for us, and to communicate what Christ has done for us to the world around us.

We need these words. We often substitute other terminology for this biblical language. And that terminology that we substitute is not necessarily bad unless we begin to allow it to completely replace this biblical terminology.

So oftentimes, we will use phrases that, strictly speaking, are not found in the New Testament to describe salvation. We will encourage people, especially children, to ask Jesus into your heart a phrase that's not found anywhere in the New Testament.

That doesn't mean that it's an unbiblical phrase. It doesn't mean that it's a terrible phrase to use. But it does mean that it's going to be lacking at some point. It's going to do a good job of expressing our need to have union with Christ by faith as He comes into our hearts, or it can express the indwelling presence of the Spirit within us.

It's a good way to express those sorts of things. But if you think by telling someone to ask Jesus into their heart, you have fully communicated the Gospel, you have not. Because they have no knowledge at that point of what Christ has actually done for them.

[29 : 33] How has His death on the cross enabled them to be united to Christ? What benefit comes from having Jesus quote-unquote in your heart? What good does that do you? You have to explain using biblical terminology.

Or, we really today love to use the language of personal relationship with Christ. And I think there's nothing wrong with that. I hope that you all have a personal relationship with Christ. I hope that you commune daily with Christ through prayer. I hope that you fully trust in Him and believe in Him so that you are united to Him by that faith and have a real, vibrant, loving relationship with Christ.

It's not a terrible term. But in and of itself, if we substitute that for words like, you need to be reconciled to God, or you need to be redeemed by Christ, or your sins need to be paid for by Him, or you need to be made right by God, if we substitute that for that biblical terminology, we will find ourselves coming up short.

And what's most dangerous, we will find ourselves telling people to believe in half of the Gospel rather than the whole Gospel, and nobody gets saved by half of the Gospel.

[30 : 46] And our mission is to go and make disciples of Jesus Christ. How can we do that if we will not tell them what Christ has done for them by using the very language and terminology that He has given to us so that we might explain it to them?

People must be told that they are sinners. People must be told that God's wrath stands over them. People must be told that they need to be justified or declared righteous by God.

People must be told that they need their sins paid for and they need to be redeemed or ransomed. People must be told that someone's got to take the wrath that they deserve and only Christ can do that.

People must be told these things so that they can believe these things and be saved. And my encouragement to you, the church, this morning is embrace this biblical vocabulary.

Embrace this way of thinking about your salvation and talking to other people about their need for salvation. Embrace this language because it's everywhere in the Bible and we need it.

[32 : 00] And then for those who maybe have not yet trusted in Christ, I implore you, believe upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by grace, freely you can be declared righteous and have your sins paid for and have your way out of sin purchased by Him.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Amen. Thank you.