

The Cross: Demonstration of God's Justice

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[0:00] I invite you to turn to Romans chapter 3 this evening. The cross of Christ on Good Friday was a place both of great darkness and of great light.

During those three hours from noon till three o'clock, the sky grew dark as night, as our Lord suffered what no man will ever know.

And yet there was also light that shined out of that dark cross, for it's at the cross that we see the clearest display of God's own glory.

It's here at the cross of Christ that we see as nowhere else the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And so at the cross we see God's attributes demonstrated.

If I had three nights to preach, I would preach the first night on the cross the demonstration of God's love, for God demonstrated his love for us in this, and that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

[1:09] And then I would preach the second night on the cross the demonstration of God's humility, for it was God the Son who humbled himself and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

And then I would preach the third night, the cross as the demonstration of God's justice. Indeed, that's what we find here in Romans chapter 3, verses 23 to 26.

For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ.

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.

He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

[2:20] Twice here, we find the cross described as a demonstration of God's justice. Clearly, this is something important, something that's not to be missed, and that's what we will meditate upon tonight.

Paul spends, as you know, in the book of Romans, the first three chapters rounding up all of humanity, the Jew and Gentile alike, and shows that we all have sinned and deserve God's punishment.

And only now, at the end of chapter 3, does he begin to speak of the free salvation that comes to hell-deserving sinners through the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross.

Twice he refers to God doing this to demonstrate his justice. So what is the concern about God's justice?

What's the problem? Why does there even need to be a demonstration of God's justice? Well, the answer is that because people are sadly mistaken about the justice of God.

[3:27] It is indeed widely doubted and denied, isn't it? And it was the serpent who first denied it in the garden.

Again, did God say that death is the punishment for eating the forbidden fruit? You will not surely die. That was a doubt upon God's justice.

And mankind bought the serpent's lie, and they still think that God is such a pushover that his big heart could never bring himself to punish people in hell forever.

Even church-going folk think that God is too kind to ever send people to eternal torments. They read in their Bibles that God is love and God is merciful, and they take comfort in that, thinking surely he'll just overlook our faults and let us into heaven at last.

His justice has been and still is widely dismissed. And so God has good reason to correct man, which is what he does in the Bible when he says over and over, be sure your sin will find you out.

[4:38] The judge of the world, he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. The judge of all the earth will do right, and he will judge the people with equity.

And in addition to correcting man's low view of God's justice with these words from Scripture, there have also been many demonstrations of God's justice down through history, haven't there?

We see the first pair, Adam and Eve, driven out of the garden and cursed. We see fire and brimstone falling out of heaven and consuming sinners by the city's full.

We see the earth opening up and swallowing sinners alive. We see plagues killing them, see the Red Sea drowning them, and many, many other displays of God's justice.

Over and over, God is saying and showing that he is just and he will punish sinners. And still the misunderstanding continues.

[5:44] Oh, that was just the God of the Old Testament. He's different, you know, now. So for all such doubters and deniers, but indeed for all of us here too, as well, God has made the ultimate demonstration of his justice on the Middle Cross outside of Jerusalem on that Good Friday 2,000 years ago.

Indeed, greater proof of his justice is seen there than is seen in hell. Now let me give you two scenarios that have raised a question mark over God's justice.

And both are referred to in our text. The first question is, how can Old Testament believers go to heaven with their sins left unpunished? I once worked with a fellow in construction who knew just enough of the Bible to be dangerous.

You know people like that? Just enough to be dangerous. He was a dear friend and fellow, but he was hung up. And he just couldn't get over this one point.

It was about King David. He knew all about David's adultery, about his murder to cover up. He knew about his repentance and his forgiveness. And the thing that galled him was that he got off so easy for his sins.

[7:08] I mean, he got to keep Bathsheba. He kept telling me that. He got to keep Bathsheba. And the whole thing was forgiven. And to heaven he went at last to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

It wasn't fair. God wasn't just. Well, it's a fair question, isn't it? What's going on here?

I thought God was holy. I thought God was just. Well, it is a fair question. And there's an answer for it, of course. And it's found on Golgotha's middle cross where God's justice was served.

Where Christ was damned. As the substitute was being punished for David's horrendous sins. Who can never hear the cry of dereliction and abandonment.

And say that God went easy on David's sins. No, Calvary demonstrates the justice of God.

[8:11] That's what Romans 3, 25 and 26 is saying. What about all those Old Testament believers? They sinned. And without being punished, they went to heaven.

And there's Adam and Eve. And they're eating the forbidden fruit. There's Noah's drunkenness.

There's Abraham's lie. And Sarah's lie. And David's adultery and murder. And Jonah's sinful anger. And Job saying things about God he should never have said. And millions of other sins in the Old Testament of believers. That they went to heaven when they died.

And their sins were not punished. Is that not a perversion of justice? A condoning of sin?

And again, our text says no. Because at the cross, God presented him, Christ Jesus, as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.

[9:10] He did this to demonstrate his justice. Because in his forbearance, he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. And he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time.

So you see, none of those sins of Old Testament believers were ever permanently left unpunished. That would be a violation of justice.

Indeed. Indeed. No, it was rather that the punishment for their sins was just delayed. Delayed. Until he came. Who was fully punished as the substitute for David.

And Adam and Eve. And all the Old Testament believers. And that brings us then to the second and broader question.

How can God be just and the justifier of wicked sinners? You see, the problem in this passage is not just the forgiveness of Old Testament sinners.

[10:14] How could God forgive them without their sins being punished and just take them to heaven? But it's the broader question of how can God forgive any sinner? Do we understand the problem sufficiently?

The question mark that is placed over God's justice. How can God be just when he's justifying wicked people? And if we've not felt that tension, we've missed something very important about God.

So let's see if we can understand both parts of that equation. How can God be just and yet the justifier of the wicked? First, what does it mean for him to be just?

What is it for a judge especially to be just? Well, it means that they're righteous. They're right. And they get it right.

They judge with perfect equity and fairness. There's never the giving of a wrong sentence, never a punishment too strict or too loose, always punishing the wicked and always letting the innocent go free.

[11 : 22] It's a just, a righteous judge that so judges. And the Bible weighs in on this in many different places. As God established judges for his Old Testament people, Israel.

He instructed those men, those judges, as to what they were to do and how they were to judge. He says in Deuteronomy 25, when men have a dispute, they're to take it to court and the judges will decide the case, acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty.

Now, to acquit, kids, just means to clear. It means to justify them, to not find them guilty, to find them innocent. And that's what they were to do.

They were to clear those who are innocent and they were to condemn the guilty and not to get the two mixed up. In 1 Kings 8, Solomon prays for God's help when court cases would be brought before him for a decision.

And he prays, Lord, then hear from heaven and act. Judge between your servants, condemning the guilty and bringing down on his own head what he has done.

[12 : 38] Declare the innocent not guilty so that and so establish his innocence. Condemn the guilty and declare the innocent not guilty.

Now, that's God's justice. He does not declare the innocent guilty or the guilty innocent. And he instructs Israel's judges to do the same.

In Exodus 23, 7, he says, Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. I will not let the guilty go free.

So don't you let the guilty go free, he says to Israel's judges. So it's because God is just that he requires human judges to make a just judgment, a right judgment.

Because they are, after all, the instruments of his justice. So he wants it to be a just decision to punish those who do wrong and to reward those who do right.

[13 : 44] Now, it's a matter that's very dear to the heart of God. Listen to what he says in Proverbs 17, 15. He detests such a judge.

And we too detest such a judge, don't we? Proverbs 24, 24 says, Whoever says to the guilty, you are innocent. People will curse him and nations denounce him.

Any judge who says to the guilty, you're innocent, will be rightly cursed and denounced by the people. Nothing offends our God-given senses more, that sense of justice, more than to see the wicked get off scot-free.

To see the innocent punished and the guilty go unpunished. So God himself is just. And he never perverts justice.

He's determined to punish sin wherever it is found. Exodus 34, 7. He does not leave the guilty unpunished. Proverbs 11, 21.

[15 : 00] Be sure of this. The wicked will not go unpunished. But those who are righteous will go free. So that's what it means for the judge to be just. How can God be just?

Okay, we understand what that means. But how can he be just and also be the justifier of the wicked? Now, what does it mean to justify the wicked?

Well, to justify means to pronounce not guilty. To justify means to clear them as innocent, as undeserving of any punishment. To declare them righteous.

This person is in a right standing with the law. There is nothing against him. That's what it means to justify. They're under no guilt, no condemnation.

But to do that to the wicked? To say that of the wicked? To declare the guilty sinner not guilty? And yet that's what God does whenever he saves anyone.

[16 : 04] He says to us who are guilty, not guilty. Does that not put a question mark over God's justice?

Is that not what he's condemned in all these texts about how judges are to judge a righteous judgment? Yes, it does raise a question over God's justice.

But once again, the cross is God's answer. And it needed an answer. That's why he set forth a demonstration of his justice. Because he knows that there needs to be a demonstration.

Lest men draw the wrong conclusion about my justice. And so verse 25 says that God presented his own son as a sacrifice of atonement.

The translation could read as a propitiating sacrifice. A sacrifice that blots out and covers sin. Such that God's wrath is pacified.

[17:13] Yes, God presented his own son as a wrath pacifying sacrifice. And how would it pacify God's wrath?

By it falling on him, the substitute. And God presented him as such a pacification of God's wrath.

And God did this, verse 26 says, to demonstrate his justice at this present time.

So as to be just and the justifier of those who believe in Jesus. And they are the wicked. As you see in chapter 4 and verse 5.

He justifies the wicked. The wicked who believe in Jesus. And you see how his justice is demonstrated.

For if wicked men have had our sins punished in full by another. Then God is indeed just. Even as he justifies us. For if the sufferings of Christ took away our sins.

[18:17] And paid for them in full. Then God is right. And just. To look upon us and say, Not guilty. She is righteous. In the eyes of the law.

She's right with God. And that's precisely. What happens. God the just. Is satisfied to look at him.

And pardon me. We sing. It's the cross of Christ that demonstrates God's justice. In justifying sinners. And you notice the importance of faith in all of this.

It's stated. At least twice in these two verses. Verses 25. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement. To cover sin. To pacify wrath. Through faith in his blood.

Verse 26. God. So that God is both just. And the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. In other words. Not all sinners. Not all the wicked are justified.

[19:19] Only. Only. Those who have faith in Jesus. Faith in Jesus' blood. Faith in what Jesus has done on the cross. Dying for sin.

The just. For the unjust. To bring us. To God. It's faith. That unites us to Christ. And to all his saving work.

And so by faith in Christ. My record. In heaven. Is changed. From guilty. To not guilty. Faith transfers my.

My sin and guilt over to Christ. And it brings his righteousness and obedience over to my account.

And so there's this great exchange. That's what faith does. It unites us to Christ.

So he gets my sin. And I get his righteousness. By faith. In his blood. Blood. Faith receives. Christ.

[20:16] And the perfect gift of his righteousness. And if his obedience. Is perfect. And it's counted mine. Then you can see why God.

When looking upon me as judge. Will declare me righteous. For he sees that robe of Christ's righteousness. That we just sang about. That he clothes us in.

Everyone. Who by faith. Looks to Christ. Christ. Chapter 4 and verse 5. States again. The crucial role of faith. However. To the man who does not work. But trust God.

Who justifies the wicked. His faith is credited. As righteousness. Yes. It's faith. Not works. That brings. This.

Right standing. Before God. So that he's able to say. Not guilty. Innocent. Righteous. In my eyes. So Calvary shows us.

[21:11] That God. God's justice. Was not violated. Not compromised. Not suspended. In the least. When he says.

Of David. Not guilty. When he says. Of you. Dear believer. Not guilty. Because Christ. Has taken all the sin. And guilt. And given. David. And you.

And to me. His righteousness. We might. Be justified. And he might. Remain. Just. In doing so.

But just. How just. Is God. The judge. We say that the cross. Is a demonstration. Of his justice. How just. Is God. After all.

Well. Suppose there was a king. Who was also the judge. Of his kingdom. And he was a kind. And reasonable man. But yet he. Upheld strict justice. He punished sin. Wherever. It was found.

[22:08] He punished crime. Wherever it was found. One year. Automobiles. Were invented. And brought into his realm. And. And it wasn't long. Before a problem.

Developed. As some. Began to drive. Under the influence. Of alcohol. And soon. Drunk. Drunk driving. Was. Repeatedly. The cause.

Of deadly accidents. And precious lives. Taken. And this. This righteous king. Was incensed. And he went. On national television. And spoke. Of the selfishness.

Of people. Who would jeopardize. The lives. Of others. On the highway. In this way. And he made a proclamation. As of today. If this ever happens again. And drunk driving.

Is found to be the cause. Of someone's death. The guilty person. Will be held. Fully responsible.

And will pay. For the death. Of the other. By their own life. Being taken. And we will not tolerate.

[23:00] Such behavior. And the clip. Is played over. And over. In the following days. And weeks. Until everyone. In the kingdom. Has heard the law. And knows the consequences.

Well sure enough. A month later. The first test case. Comes before his court. A man has proven. To have been under the influence. When he rear-ended a car. And took the life. Of a 19 year old.

Young lady. And the king judge. Brought a guilty verdict. And pronounced. That the full penalty. Of the law. Must be paid. Life for life. You were warned.

You did not heed the warning. And his life was taken. Several months later. The same thing happens. This time. A young man. Under the influence. Drifts over the center line.

Into oncoming traffic. And a whole family. In the other car. Is killed. And it's an easy case. The facts are clear. The only complicating factor.

[23:56] Is that the guilty young man. Before him. Is the judge's. Own son. His only son. The son of his love. Do you see how this case.

Above all others. Will be the test case. For this judge. And will demonstrate. To one and all. Whether he is just.

Or unjust. If he upholds the law now. At such a cost. To himself. Then all the empire. Will know. Just how just.

He is. It's inflexible justice. Untainted by bribes.

Or favoritism. Truly. He is determined. To punish crime. Wherever. It is found. God. Well it was something.

[24:54] Like that. That Friday. Long ago. Outside of Jerusalem. Where God the just. Was holding court. The law.

Had already. Rung out. From his heaven. That the soul. That sins. It shall surely die. He does not leave. The guilty. Unpunished. Unpunished. He punishes.

Sin. Wherever. It is found. And now. Before him. Comes his own. Well beloved son. Not as the sinless one.

Not standing. Before him. Now. As. The holy. Blameless. And pure one. But as the representative. And substitute. Of his people. With all their sins.

Transferred. Upon him. Because God. Made him. Who had no sin. To be sin. For us.

[25:52] The Lord. Has laid on him. The iniquity. Of us all. He himself. Bore our sins. In his body. To the tree. And when it says.

He bore them. It means he. He bore the full. Responsibility. For them. To the tree. The place. Of punishment. And so the judge. Looks upon his son.

Whom he dearly loved. And delighted in. For all eternity. And he now. Sees him. As the greatest sinner. That ever lived. Laden with all the murder. And sexual immorality.

And pride. And idolatry. And envy. And jealousy. And backbiting. And gossip. And perversion. And greed. Indeed. Every sin in the book. As he stands. Before God.

The judge. The proof. Is as plain. As day. May. But what. Will the judge. Do. That's the question. This is the test case.

[26:45] For his justice. Will he go light. On the guilty. Because it's his son. His only son. His well beloved son. And the answer.

Of scripture is. No. He is too just. For that. He is too holy. To bend. Justice. Even one millimeter.

He did not spare. His own son. He condemned him. To the full penalty. Of the law. And executed. The sentence himself.

For it pleased the Lord. To crush him. He was indeed stricken. By God. Smitten. By him. And afflicted.

Not a drop of God's wrath. Was withheld. From his cup. He was pierced. He was crushed. He was punished. He was wounded. As in my place.

[27 : 40] Condemned. He stood. Damned. Instead of me. Enduring my punishment. Enduring my curse. And forsakenness. And hell. Many hands.

Were raised. To wound him. None. Would interpose. To save. But the deepest. Stroke. That pierced him. Was the stroke. That justice. Gave. As God was.

Demonstrating. His justice. On Calvary. Oh how just. Is this judge. At Calvary. Every question mark. Over the justice.

Of God. From the garden. Of Eden. Down to today. Was answered. At Calvary. For here. We see. That God.

Is so determined. To punish sin. Wherever it is found. That he does so. Even when it's found. In his own beloved son. As he bears the sins. Of others.

[28 : 37] God is so just. That he would sooner. Leave us all. To perish in hell. Than to save us. In a way. That would violate. His justice. He cannot.

Deny himself. It would ungod him. He would no longer. Be God. God. And yet. God is so loving. That he would sooner.

Punish his own. Beloved son. Than to leave us. To perish. In our sins. What justice. What love. Combined.

At the middle cross. Of Calvary. So the cross. Of Christ. Is the greatest. Demonstration. Of God's judgment. I said earlier. It's even greater. Than the demonstration. Of God's justice.

In hell. Because in hell. God punishes. Rebel sinners. Who hated him. But on the cross. He punished. His own son. Who loved. And obeyed him.

[29 : 32] And whom he loved. From all eternity. Do you see. His commitment. To justice. Sinner friend. This is the justice.

Of the judge. You will have to stand. Before one day. And give an account. He is determined. To punish. Sin. Wherever it is found. And if he did not.

Spare his own son. When he was bearing. The sins of others. Do you think. For a moment. He will. Spare you. As you appear.

Before God. The judge. With your sins. Unatoned for. Uncovered. By the blood. Of Christ. It's a fearful thing. To fall into the hands. Of an angry God.

For he is. A consuming fire. But it is the good news. Of good Friday. That there is one safe place. To be.

[30 : 27] That will keep you. As a refuge. As a covering. A safe hiding place. And it's in the Lamb of God. Himself. Take your sins to Jesus. Put all your hopes.

In him. To save you. That his death. Will cover your sins. And make you right. With God. By taking the wrath. You deserve. And leaving you.

With his righteousness. In right standing. With God. That's his offer to you. From the cross. It is offered. To you. From the throne of God.

As the risen. Resurrected. Reigning. Lord Jesus. I lay my sins. On Jesus. The spotless. Lamb of God. He bears them all.

And freezes. From the accursed load. Trust in Christ. And live. And believers. This is what it costs. To justify you.

[31 : 23] And to do it in a way. That did not violate. God's justice. Christ dying for sins. Once for all. But just for the unjust. To bring us to God.

For God made him. Who had no sin. To be sin for us. Why? So that in him. We. We wicked. It might become. The righteousness of God.

So righteous. That God the just. Can declare us. Not guilty. Outside of Christ. The justice of God. Is a most dreadful reality. But inside of Christ. It is a wonderful reality. God's justice. Has nothing bad to say. To all of us. Who are in Christ. Not one word.

To say against us. The Lord Jesus. Has suffered. The full penalty. For all your sins. Past. Present. And future. Your sins. Have already appeared.

[32 : 19] In judgment. They've already appeared. In court. They've already been judged. In Jesus Christ. The verdict. Was guilty. The punishment. Was not spared. The cup of God's wrath.

Was drank. Down to the dregs. It is finished. It is finished. So that now. Justice smiles. And asks no more.

There's nothing more to pay. There's nothing to complain about. No law breaking. To complain about. Not. For those who are trusting in Jesus. And so at Calvary.

The justice of God. Has become my friend. And God's justice. Is now for me. Whereas it once. Was against me. And it is my assurance. Of forgiveness. And full salvation.

For God is still. As committed. To his own justice. As ever. He cannot deny himself. He cannot go back. On his word. He cannot punish. Sin twice. Once in my substitute.

[33 : 18] And then again in me. He's too just for that. Hallelujah. Therefore. If we confess our sins. He is faithful. And just. To forgive us our sins.

And to cleanse us. From all unrighteousness. It's his own justice. That will not allow sins. That have already been punished. In Christ.

To be punished again. Payment. He will not twice demand. Once at my dear. Substitute's hand. And then again. At mine. And so.

As we come to Calvary. To see the justice. That reigns here. We should put off our shoes. For its hallowed ground. We should put off our pride.

And our self-righteousness. And our sins. And our apathy. And bow. And worship. And here we love the Father.

[34 : 14] For not sparing his own son. And here we love the Son. For willingly drinking the cup of God's wrath. That we might drink from the cup of blessing forever and ever.

And here we love the Holy Spirit. For ever opening up these sin-blinded eyes. To my sin. And to the loveliness of Jesus.

And what he has done for sinners. Dear believer. Read God's heart. For you tonight at the cross. If this God did not spare his own son for you.

How will he not also along with him. Freely give you all things. This is the God. Who is for us. For us at Calvary.

For us in the grave. For us in the resurrection. For us from the throne. For us in the day of death. For us in the day of judgment.

[35 : 13] For us for all eternity. May God add his blessing to our thoughts tonight.