

Homily for Reformation, 2021

Romans 3:24-25

'The multi-faceted diamond of the Gospel'

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INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of Jesus Christ,
- what God has done for us in Christ to save us,

Is like a precious multi-faceted diamond.

As you turn it around and look at it from different angles,
Each time you can see something new,
It shines with a new glory and wonder.

The good news of Jesus Christ is rich and inexhaustible,

So that the Apostles as they proclaim it and unpack it and articulate it,
They do so,
in many different ways,
using different words and pictures,

but which all work together,
they complement each other,

and so bring out the unsearchable riches of Christ.

On this Reformation Day,

We simply want to turn that diamond and so see the Gospel of Christ from three vantage points,
Using three words and pictures the Apostle Paul gives us in these verses.

First that we are justified,

Second that we are redeemed,

And third that our sins are atoned for.

Three big words, a bit of work to do,
But three glorious perspectives on the Gospel,

Which we pray the Spirit of God will use to press more deeply into our hearts and minds what God has done for us in Christ Jesus.

Justification,
Redemption,
Atonement.

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JUSTIFICATION

First, is to be justified.

The Apostle writes,
²³*since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;*
²⁴*they are now **justified** by his grace as a gift...*

So, what is this language,
What is the picture behind this word justified?

Well,
It's the picture of a law court,
This is legal imagery.

For nearly two chapters in Romans the Apostle Paul has building his argument to show that in the court of God's perfect law,
All human beings are guilty,

Whether Jew or Gentile,
Whether they claim to believe in God or not,

The Apostle Paul makes the case that there is a sense in which every human being stands accountable to God as their creator,

in the courtroom of his perfect justice every human being stands guilty.

And human beings do seem to have a deep sense of this which manifests in one way or another.

So often people in life experience guilt because they feel they don't measure up to some standard,
Whether it's their own,
Their parents,
That of the society around them,

I remember walking in our children's childcare centre one day,

And one of the mother's had forgotten to bring in some plate of food or whatever it was for the children's activity that day,

And I was walking behind her as she went out the door and she mumbled to herself, 'another parental failure'.

And my heart broke.

The guilt,
Over not measuring up,

The guilt at falling short,

And the problem is we don't fix the problem by our well-meaning attempts at just saying: 'oh don't be so hard in yourself...',

Because deep down our conscience tells us that there is one to whom we will finally give account,
His justice is perfect,
And every one of us falls short.

Friends apart from Christ,
You stand condemned,
You are guilty,

Your sins of thought, word and deed,
Your falling short,

Mean there is no case you make in the heavenly courtroom,
Left on your own.

But the Good news of justification,

The glory of this vantage point on the precious diamond,

Is that in Christ,
You are declared innocent,
In Christ,
You are declared righteous,

In Christ,

By God's grace,
As a gift to you,

You are justified,

His death and resurrection secure this,
*'He was handed over to death for our trespasses,
And raised for our justification'* (Rom 4:25).

So that, *'There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus'* (Rom 8:1).

My friend walking out of the childcare centre needed to hear this.

She needed to know,
As we all do,

That when we fail to measure up to the standards in this life,
When we fall short in so many ways,

There is gracious God,
Who has sent his Son Jesus Christ,

So that in the final and ultimate and all-encompassing trial,

You are not condemned,
In Christ you are declared innocent and righteous before God almighty.

Justified.

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REDEMPTION

Now let's turn that diamond just slightly,
As the Apostle moves from that vantage point of being justified,
To another of being redeemed.

²⁴*they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the **redemption** that is in Christ Jesus,*

So what is this word about?
What's the picture we meant to see behind the language of being redeemed?

This imagery moves from the legal,
To the commercial,

We still talk about redeeming gift vouchers and such things don't we,
This is something to do with commercial transactions.

And in the Bible then,
And the ancient world generally,

The word is most often used in the context of slaves being redeemed,
Of slaves being purchased and brought out of their slavery to serve another.

The whole Exodus too from Egypt is described as the Lord redeeming his people.

So here we have a good connection with our Gospel reading where Jesus talks about slavery.

Those he was talking too were confused of course,
They were thinking about physical slavery,

Whereas Jesus was talking about what we could call spiritual slavery,

He says, *'Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.'*

So our problem is not just that we live in a way which makes us guilty before God Almighty,

But according to Jesus,
Our sin actual exercises some power over us,

There's something about sin which ends up mastering and driving us and so catching us in its trap.

In full blown addictive behaviour we can see this fairly clearly.

Whether it's drunkenness, pornography, excessive gambling,

When we are caught up in these sins we like to think we have control over them,
But very soon they have control over us,

They make us do things we don't even want to do.

There's an enslaving power there.

But whether you're tempted to those more dramatic manifestations of addiction or not,
the same dynamic is at work in each of our hearts.

For example,
For many of us our deepest trust is not in the true God,
But in what others think of us,

We have this first commandment issue of making a god out of the approval of others.

And how easily we can become enslaved to that.

How quickly we can find ourselves doing and saying things that, again,
We don't even want to do at some level,

But we trapped in this sin,
We're enslaved to needing the approval of others.

But the Good news of redemption,
Is that in Christ Jesus God has acted to free you from your slavery to sin.

*'You are justified by his grace as a gift,
Through the **redemption** that is in Christ Jesus.'*

'So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.' John 8:36

Your God has not left you alone in your bondage and captivity.

As God sent Moses into Egypt to redeem his people from slavery and bring them to the true freedom of the promised land,

The Lord God has sent his one and only Son into this world to redeem you,
To deliver you,
To free you from your slavery to sin.

You are freed,
From finding solace and comfort only in a bottle,
Or images on a screen,

You are free in Christ,
From constantly looking to other human beings for that approval you seek,

Because in Christ you have it,
In Christ the redeemer God has acted to become your God who will give you everything you need.

You are justified,
You are redeemed,

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ATONEMENT

And finally, we turn that diamond once more to another angle,

And we hear that our sins are also **atoned** for.

*'...justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a sacrifice of **atonement** by his blood, effective through faith.'*

What is the light of God's glory that shines from this facet of the diamond of the Gospel?

Well,

Here we are to picture not the courtroom,
Or the slave-market,

But the temple.

Where once a year on the great Day of Atonement,
The priest would enter the Holy of Holies deep in the temple,
Go to the ark of the covenant,
The place of God's presence,

And there was a cover,
Between the figures of the Cherubim,
It was called the mercy seat,

And there the priest would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice,

To make atonement for the people's sins and uncleanness,

Which otherwise prevented them from meeting with God,
and receiving his grace and blessing.

Let's think about the reality this speaks to even in our everyday lives.

Let's say a person at work generally does a good job,
And has a good relationship with their boss.

But then they make a mistake,
They do something wrong,
They tell a few little lies to try and cover it up,

Then they're caught.

Now the situation can be worked through.

They did the wrong thing,
Their guilty,
But there's some grace there and they can get another chance.

They did get caught up, trapped, in their little situation,
But they can be freed from that now that everything out in the open,
And they can move on.

But then as the person tries to go about their work,
They realise there's another problem,

No matter what else has been dealt with,

The relationship with the boss has been damaged.

There's still something there between them,

And restoring that relationship is another whole dynamic than dealing with what's happened.

Our problem as human beings is not just that we are guilty before God apart from Christ,
Even though we are,

And it's not just that we are in slavery to sin apart from Christ,
Even though we are.

But the deeper problem is that our sin means there is that something stuck between us and God,

there is a rupture in the relationship,

That we on our own simply can do nothing to overcome.

And the problem is far more severe than the boss who is mildly disappointed in the employee.

The Apostle Paul in the lead up to our text has been stressing that our sin and wickedness,
Our hard and impenitent hearts,

Are '*storing up wrath for ourselves on the day of judgment*' (Rom 2:5) apart from Christ.

Wrath is anger.

God who is holy and just,
Is angry at sin,

And he wouldn't be just if he simply pretended as if it were no big deal.

But the good news of atonement,

Is that Christ himself is that mercy seat,
That atonement.

The same God who is angry at sin,
is full of love for the world,

So God *himself* in his Son,
Has provided the once for all sacrifice that turns away that wrath,
That absorbs the punishment that our sins deserve,

It is the blood of Christ that is shed once and for all,

So that this rupture between you and God is repaired,
Restored,
There is peace,

A renewed relationship.

That employee doesn't just want HR to help them put that mistake behind them and file it away,

They want to favour of their boss back.

That's what you have in Christ.

The Lord God's face shines on you,
He looks with favour on you,

In Christ, God is pleased with you.

And it happens not because of anything you do,
But at God's initiative,

And you receive it all as a gift through faith.

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CONCLUSION

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is like a precious diamond,

Which you turn this way and that and each time shines with the glory of God in a slightly different way,

In Jesus Christ God justified you,
He redeems you,
And he atones for you.

In the absolution this morning God declared again to you that your sins are forgiven,
You are justified and freed,

And now you are invited to the Supper of the Lamb where that very body he offered up,
That very blood he shed,
Is given to you.

If you've been a Christian for many years I pray the Spirit of God would press this precious Gospel more deeply into your heart and mind today.

If you've turned away from him or have never put your faith in this precious Gospel of Christ Jesus,

He invited you this day to trust him and receive all that he wants to give you.

God grant it to us for Jesus' sake, Amen.