

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

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[0 : 0 0] sometimes in our lives we'll maybe be in conversation with a particular person and that person will say something about a particular situation or about a particular subject to which we will maybe respond by saying well yes that's it in a nutshell that's it in a nutshell i suppose what we mean when we when we say those words or when we use that phrase is really to say that whatever has just been articulated and said by that person is really a helpful and a succinct kind of summary of the entire situation the entire subject that happens to be under consideration or under discussion well this morning what we're looking at together is i believe one of the best gospel in a nutshell statements to be found anywhere in the entirety of our bibles because here in verses 23 to 25 of romans chapter 3 is a statement from the apostle paul given to him by the inspiration of god the holy spirit and as he wrote this great letter to the church in rome which very succinctly sets out for us the absolute fundamentals of the christian gospel the truth concerning god's offer of salvation in the person of his blessed son the lord jesus christ in other words you know if someone was to ask you the question maybe at work this week maybe someone in your street someone in your town perhaps one of your extended family members they were to come to you and they were to ask you this quest this question uh how would you sum up this thing called the christian gospel i mean you're always using this phrase the gospel and sometimes you will elaborate on that phrase and you'll say that it's the good news of salvation but what is this good news what is this gospel how does this salvation thing actually work well here would be a very good place to draw that person's attention here is what we might think of as the answer to this question in a nutshell and so what i want to do this morning is simply to break this great statement down into four essential parts first of all paul underlines here the universal need for this salvation second he spells out the free offer of this salvation third is the means of this salvation and fourth the instrument by which this salvation is personally received first the universal need for this salvation he says in verse 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of god now another statement you'll sometimes hear people saying is they'll say well i suppose or i guess if you're in america that is where it's at that is where it's at meaning when all is said and done here is the position we find ourselves in here is our situation well if ever there was a statement that

articulated and summed up in such solemn terms where things are at for all people at all times then this is surely i want you to notice three things about this statement first of all he speaks here of all people all have sinned he says now if you read through the book of romans you'll know that one of the big themes especially from chapter 1 through to verse 20 of chapter 3 is precisely this it is to set forth particularly for the benefit of the first century jews the fact that all people whoever they are wherever they're from have sinned against god and on the basis of that sin stand guilty before him some of the jews were evidently trapped and tempted into thinking as we were considering just last night they were trapped and enticed into thinking that they held some sort of inherent righteousness before god purely on the basis of their racial ethnicity their heritage their heritage is the people who belong to that physical nation of israel and so paul will actually say back in verse 9 of this very chapter he says what then are we jews any better off no he says not at all for we have already charged that all both jews and greeks are under sin as it is written none is righteous no not one no one understands no one seeks god and so the one thing that paul wants to impress upon our hearts as he goes about articulating this glorious gospel of salvation is that there are absolutely no exceptions when it comes to this human condition this predicament the formula is that there are always in the world of salvation as he goes about what he says is that there are always in the world that he says no one has a man who wants to live in the world well he says all have sinned and fall short of the glory of god now this word sin or to have sinned is described in various ways throughout the scriptures all of which really combine in order to highlight the solemnity and the extent of our

problem.

To be a sinner in biblical terms means to be one who has literally missed the mark or is well wide of God's standard of righteousness.

It means in the words of the Westminster Confession that we have transgressed or broken God's holy law.

To be a sinner is to be one who is lawless or rebellious, who is unrighteous before our Creator.

[7 : 29] It means to have our backs turned to God and to be one who does not fear the Lord nor seek after Him. And of course to remain in this state is to be then under His condemnation.

We are not naturally speaking on our right footing with our Creator. Instead we are living in enmity with God and we are awaiting His righteous judgment upon our lives.

Now all of that, all of that has already been set forth by the Apostle in those well-known words of verses 10 to 18.

I'm not going to read them just now, but he's simply summarizing then here in this statement the entire predicament that all men are in with this little phrase, all have sinned.

The second thing to notice is that where he speaks of the fact that all fall short of the glory of God.

What's interesting there is the word that's used for fall short.

[8 : 45] It's actually the same word that's used by the Lord Himself in the parable of the prodigal son when he speaks of the boy in the far country and how he began to be in want.

And so what is really being said here is that owing to this sinful state that I've just described, there is as a consequence of that sin this inherent and solemn reality that we are people who are devoid of or lacking in that which is required in order to behold the glory of God and then to respond to that glory in a way that is then glorifying of God Himself.

In other words, we are each and every one of us because of original sin and in our natural state we are people who are in want of or lacking in the ability to do the very thing that we were actually originally created to do which is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

Friends, do you see how desperately dependent we are on God's sovereign grace on His mercy on His intervention in our lives?

We are dependent and desperate because all have broken God's holy law and therefore stand guilty before Him and under condemnation and we are desperate because in that same sin condition the truth is that we are incapable of fulfilling that wonderful purpose for which we were actually born in the first place which is to live for the praising of His own glory.

[10 : 55] Now this leads us on to our second point this morning and what I'm simply calling the free offer of salvation.

He says, For all have sinned and fall short of God's glory and are justified by His grace as a gift.

Now this word justified or justification is a term which speaks to us of an authoritative legal verdict having been pronounced whereby a person is not only acquitted of his or her crimes by the judge but they are also then as part of that same verdict declared to be righteous and approved as opposed to unrighteous and under condemnation.

In other words it's not ultimately a statement about something that actually changes within our person. It's not synonymous with regeneration in that sense but instead it concerns how we are now viewed by another.

John Calvin said this he said justification is our acceptance by God whereby He receives us into His favour and regards us as righteous.

[12 : 39] So that whereas apart from Jesus Christ we are declared we are declared as those who are unrighteous and guilty before God yet in Jesus Christ we become beneficiaries of His righteousness under which we are vindicated and we are justified before God.

And what Paul is impressing upon us here is that this monumental change in a person standing before the Lord is purely and simply a gift of God's grace.

It cannot be purchased by us it cannot be earned by us it cannot be worked for by our own efforts it is a free gift which God not only offers to sinful men and women but He gives to sinful men and women according to His own sovereign grace.

And of course this is precisely what lay at the very heart of the reformation of the church in the 16th century. The Roman church wanted to say as it still wants to say that good works are somehow incorporated into or necessary for our justification our right standing before the Almighty.

This is what led the great reformer Martin Luther into such despair in his life. It didn't matter how hard he prayed how much he sacrificed as a priest still there was this emptiness still this lingering doubt this great unease within his soul.

[14 : 34] Ah but until one day the whole doctrine of justification of being made right with God by His grace alone through faith alone came flooding in like a fresh water spring upon his soul and the man was never the same again.

Dear friends there is surely nothing more glorious in all the world than the free offer of salvation the fact that a holy and almighty creator God should look upon helpless rebels such as we were and yet be pleased to reckon us to himself simply because of his infinite love for sinful men and women what kind of a merciful God is this?

now having said all of this if we were to just stop there at the end of this statement on justification if there was nothing else that followed on from this then we would have to actually conclude that God would be an unjust God because any judge who satisfies or who justifies rather wicked criminals without there being an appropriate punishment or penalty for those crimes any judge who does that is surely in defiance of the most basic rules of justice in other words a price still had to be paid justice had to be satisfied this leads us on to the means of this salvation

Paul says for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift but then how we might ask by what means are we justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God has put forward as a propitiation by his blood in other words the entire means of this salvation the basis on which this salvation is able to be given and received by depraved and dead and otherwise hell bound sinners is on the basis that God has given his son and this son has shed his blood on the cross there is in other words a robust exclusivity to this salvation it is not possible for this gap this horrendous gulf between sinful man and holy

God to be bridged by any other means than by the giving of his only begotten son the Lord Jesus Christ now the primary reason that this is the case that there is this exclusivity to salvation in Jesus Christ is really summed up for us in this word propitiation hilasterio this is really the noun equivalent of the verb that we were thinking about last night hilastemi for those who were here which literally speaks of a sacrifice which satisfies and therefore averts from us the wrath of holy God for our sins it's actually a word which points us all the way back in our Bibles in a sense to what was the mercy seat in the

[19 : 15] Old Testament that covering or that lid over the ark of the covenant upon which the blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the day of atonement and so just as all those animal sacrifices were essentially intended as a kind of foreshadowing of the real thing here is the apostle Paul now speaking to us of that true and final lamb of God who was sacrificed for the sins of the elect it's speaking to us of that moment that very moment on the cross when Jesus cried out my God my God why have you forsaken me it was the moment when he suffered the full displeasure of our creator by drinking down in full the cup of

God's wrath his righteous justice that should have been poured out upon our lives for all of eternity but instead was poured out him down upon the son of God himself in other words in order for this great gift of justification to be granted by God an unquantifiable price had to be paid holy justice had to be satisfied satisfied the wages of sin had to be met dear friends the glorious news of the gospel is that holy justice was satisfied in the sacrificial offering of the

Lord Jesus Christ these words of Isaiah 53 but he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his wounds we are healed is there anything in all the world more solemn and profound and humbling than this that he who knew no sin he who lived his life in perfect uprightness before God never turning to the left or to the right perfectly pure and honouring in all that he did in all that he ever said the son of

God that he should become sin for us that he should then suffer the full consequence of that sin why so that in him we could become the righteousness of God what a faithful saviour what a good shepherd he is that this shepherd would lay down his life for the sake of his sheep that we might live him with him in the glory of his eternal kingdom praise be to God for his goodness in the gospel of Jesus Christ and yet the question is who then are those sheep because again if we were to simply stop here if we were to stop at this point in Paul's great statement we might actually be in danger of having in our minds a sort of liberalised version of the gospel in the form of universalism the idea that well this is what

God has done this is what he's like he's done all of this before we were even born there's not been any mention so far of a particular people and so we might be left with the conclusion well then everyone must now be safe this is what God has done so I can just go and get on with my life that is why the final section of this great statement is so vital for our understanding all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God there is the need are justified by his grace as a gift there is the free offer through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood that is the means to be received by faith in other words the reality of this salvation of having sin paid for

[25 : 11] God's wrath averted from our lives is absolutely a gift of God's grace from beginning to end but then just like any other gift it still has to be personally received and the method or the instrument by which we receive this gift says Paul is purely and simply by faith now in terms of what that means the root word here literally means to persuade or be persuaded and so to be one who possesses this faith this only means Paul is saying of receiving true salvation is at its most basic level to be a person who has become the object of divine persuasion that is we have been persuaded of God by a supernatural work of his Holy

Spirit and through a knowledge of his gospel that we are indeed those sinners who have fallen short of his glory we have been persuaded of God that Jesus Christ his only begotten son has come in the flesh and that his righteousness and his sacrifice is the only basis on which we can be saved saved and then as a result of that divine persuasion we are personally now turning from sin and we are looking to Jesus Christ and we are trusting in his merits his work as being the beginning and the end of our salvation our justification before God now do you notice that I've not said anything here at this stage about good works

I've not said anything about growing in the faith I've not said anything about persevering in the faith or about counting the cost of true discipleship so what am I saying am I advocating this morning some form of cheap grace a salvation that doesn't involve these things perseverance prayerfulness obedience to the law well of course not of course not these things are absolutely vital in the Christian life but what we need to understand here is that there is a very clear distinction between what is involved in our justification are being made right with God and then the evidence that that justification has been personally received the ground of our justification the act of making sinners right with God is entirely a work of God himself in the person of his only begotten son but then the evidence that that justification has been received is that it will then express itself through this persuasion of God in the heart and the mind and that persuasion will then always result every time in a life of repentance obedience and good works and you see the reason that this distinction is so important is that if we're not careful it is very easy for us to begin to question our standing before God whenever we start to feel a little bit weaker in the faith maybe the extent of our repentance doesn't feel to us as deep or profound or as solemn as it once did or maybe we have entered into a season where we honestly just don't feel that we have been as fruitful as we once were at a different stage in our lives now again friends don't misunderstand what is being said here all of those things are vital all of those things should be examined before God throughout the course of our lives each day of our lives but do you see that what happens if we're not careful is that we can end up turning what are expressions of our genuine faith into another works basis on which we are actually justified and you see this is really

Paul's great purpose as he sets out the true nature of salvation in chapters 1 to 11 of this great epistle this is why he says back in verse 20 for by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight and then later in verse 21 but now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law although the law and the prophets bear witness to it what is he saying is he saying that the law is no longer important that we should just go on sinning of course he's not but he's saying here is a justification here is a right standing before God here is a declaration of righteousness that is accomplished by absolutely nothing that is in you or of you friends do you see that yes of course we must repent that yes of course we must produce fruit in keeping with that repentance but do you see that in the final analysis these things are only ever expressions outworkings of a life which has first been persuaded of God that he has secured our justification from beginning to end and the way that he has done so is through the sacrifice of his blessed son the Lord

Jesus Christ dear loved wants have you come to acknowledge your sinner who before this holy God that you are one who has sinned and fallen short of his glory have you been persuaded of God that he has sent his only begotten son into this world that Jesus Christ is the son of God come in

the flesh have you seen that he is the one who lived the life that you and I could never live have you come to recognize humbly all that he did on that cross paying the penalty for the transgressions of your life have you come to see that he is the one who was raised in glory and power from the dead on the third day and who is now exalted on high at the right hand of God do you understand that he is the one who is going to come and to judge the living and the dead and have you by his grace therefore turned and trusted in him said

[33 : 57] Lord be my saviour forgive my sins committed your way to him because dear friend if that is you if you have come to recognise this and to confess him as this saviour and this lord then you are justified you are forgiven of God you are a child of God you belong to the covenant of his grace listen to these words from Charles Haddon Spurgeon and with this I'll close he said it is ever the Holy Spirit's work to turn their eyes away from self to Jesus but Satan's work is just the opposite of this for he is constantly trying to make us regard ourselves instead of Christ he insinuates your sins are too great for pardon you have no faith you do not repent enough you will never be able to continue to the end you have not the joy of his true children you have such a wavering hold of

Jesus all these are thoughts about self and we shall never find comfort or assurance by looking within but the Holy Spirit turns our eyes entirely away from self he tells us that we are nothing but that Christ is all in all remember therefore it is not your hold of Christ that saves you it is Christ it is not your joy in Christ that saves you it is Christ it is not even faith in Christ though that be the instrument it is Christ's blood and his merits therefore looks not so much to your hand with which you are grasping

Christ as to Christ look not to your hope but to Jesus the source of your hope look not to your faith but to Jesus the author and the finisher of your faith we shall never find happiness by looking at our prayers our doings or our feelings it is what Jesus is not what we are that gives rest to the soul if we would at once overcome Satan and have peace with God it must be by looking unto Jesus keep your eyes simply on him let his death his suffering his merits his glories his intercession be fresh upon your mind when you wake in the morning look to him when you lie down at night look to him do not let your hopes or fears come between you and

Jesus follow hard after him and he will never fail you let us pray together you