

[Peniel sings “There Is A Fountain Filled With Blood” accompanied by Harvey as a normal solo. When she gets to the second verse, Pastor Jim walks up, the song is sung at a quieter level, and Pastor Jim goes into the introduction of the sermon while “There Is A Fountain Filled With Blood” continues.]

William Cowper was an English poet who lived in the 1700’s. He authored some of our most beloved hymns that we still sing today. ... Although we cannot tell from his poems and hymns... William Cowper experienced great difficulty in life. ... He had a miserable childhood. His mother was snatched away from him (by death)... when he was only six years old. ... He was immediately rushed off to a boarding school where... being small for his age... and possessing the sensitive nature (that poets are known to have)... young William was mercilessly badgered... bullied... and beaten by the older boys. ... Eventually his suppressing all of his feelings of inner rage had taken their toll on him.

Somehow he survived boarding school and gained entry into law school. Cowper struggled through his time as a law student. He almost graduated... But in his final year... **terrors** overwhelmed him... and on more than one occasion... he seemed to have a mental breakdown. ... He was known to burst into a rage... shouting about guilt that he was feeling concerning wrongful thoughts and actions that he allowed. He did not like who he was. ... Twice he tried to commit suicide.

Eventually (twenty-five-year-old) William Cowper was committed to an insane asylum. ... (Now)... You probably know that two hundred years ago... being confined to an asylum often meant receiving the most

inhumane treatment. Mental patients were treated cruelly. But Cowper's doctor (Dr. Cotton) was a devout Christian... and he treated the distraught poet in a way that brought him out of his depression. ... Dr. Cotton also did something else. He modeled the loving nature of Jesus Christ.

It was while William Cowper was a patient at the insane asylum... that one day... as he later wrote about it... he *“flung himself into a chair beside the open window... and seeing Bible there... decided to open it and read.”* He thought that he would give Scripture one more chance to bring him comfort and needed instruction. The pages fell open to the very verses that we come to (today) in our study through the Book of Romans.

“Immediately I received the strength to believe”... the poet later wrote... “and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness shone on me.” ... “In a moment... I believed and received the Gospel...”

Cowper said afterwards that he could have died with gratitude and joy... so overwhelmed was his spirit in that moment. ... He was utterly transformed. ... Later he wrote about his conversion. ... It is the victorious hymn that you have been hearing Harvey play and Peniel sing.

As an interesting sidelight to the story of William Cowper... exactly 100 years before... these very same Bible verses (our passage of study for today) brought a similar deliverance to another seriously disturbed Englishman... who was also changed by it... and went on to become a famous author. That was John Bunyan (who wrote the iconic Christian classic - “Pilgrim’s Progress.”) John Bunyan wrote about his encounter

with Christ... after reading this Bible passage: *“Oh what a turn it made upon me! I was as one awakened out of some troublesome dream.”*

... .. [P A U S E]

There is nothing in all life and history... that is more important... than the truth we encounter in today’s Bible passage. ... The issue of “where you will spend eternity”... hangs on these truths. What could be more important than that...?

“How can a person be saved...?” ... Nowhere in the Bible is there a more succinct and clearer answer to that question... than the verses we come to today... in our study through the Book of Romans. Theologian John Calvin wrote: *“There is **not** probably in the whole Bible a passage which sets forth more profoundly the righteousness of God in Christ.”* (In other words)... this concentrated passage... shows us the way to be made right with God... through Christ... like no other set of verses.

So before we turn to it and open it for study... please pray with me... for God’s Holy Spirit to use our passage in our own lives.

- **PRAY** -

[*Music ends after the prayer*]

There is one other thing that I want to do before diving into our passage. I think that I should explain a few terms that we will encounter in the passage. (There are some real jaw-breakers in it – “redemption,” “justification,” and “propitiation.”) Let me explain those terms... so they won’t be a snag to you... and shut down your interacting with the passage – when we come to them. I **don’t** know how common those words were in

William Cowper's day... or John Bunyan's day... but they can be real roadblocks today... when we try to work through this passage. ... No one can really understand our passage (or the Bible... for that matter)... without understanding these terms.

So... let's start with the first one that I mentioned – “redemption.”

I am going to show my age (here) with an illustration. Back in the 1960's nearly every grocery store gave away either “Blue Chip Stamps” or “S & H Green Stamps” with every purchase that you made at their store. If you spent five dollars you would get a certain number of stamps... and if you spent ten dollars you would get twice as many stamps. The more you spent... the greater amount of stamps you would get.

When you had enough blue chip stamps pasted in a blue chip stamp book... or enough S&H green stamps in a S&H green stamp book... you could go to their “redemption center.” That was a place where they had all sorts of merchandise (kitchen appliances... living room furniture... bath towels... and toys.) I loved going to the redemption center with my mom... in hopes that she would trade her stamp books for a new bicycle or skate board for me... but she usually traded them for things like a new coffee table for the living room... or a coffee maker... or clothes iron.

At the blue chip redemption center... you could not use S&H green stamps... postal stamps... or even US dollar bills... if you wanted to take any of their merchandise home. It had to be the exact amount of BLUE CHIP Stamps – or it didn't leave the redemption center. (The same was true about S&H green stamps. They would only take their stamps.)

Redemption means to buy back with the right substance. ... An ancient illustration may also help.

Long before governments offered any kind of welfare or poverty assistance programs... a person could fall into debt... lose his or her land... and become completely destitute — hopelessly impoverished with no family to whom he or she could turn. ... The only possible means of avoiding debtor’s prison... or starvation... was to become sell yourself to someone wealthy... that is... ask someone with lots of money... to pay off all that you owe to others... and in exchange you would be their property (you would be their special kind of slave... known as an “indentured servant.”)

Every once in a while (not very often... but it did sometimes happen)... that there was an **unimaginably** kind person... who would agree to help someone who was in such need. The wealthy person showed tremendous grace by paying off all the debts of the person... and then set them free by not making them an indentured servant. The indebted person would thus be “redeemed” from debt and slavery.

Christ is willing to redeem us. ... He has paid the only acceptable price.
... .. [P A U S E]

Here is the next word – “justification.” ... This is a legal term used in a court of law... when a judge’s gavel bangs down with a pronouncement of “not guilty.” The person on trial received “justification.”

Several years ago... the trial of OJ Simpson was called the “Trial of the Century.” Everyone seemed to pause from their day to watch live court scenes... as OJ was put on trial - having been accused of murdering his

ex-wife. OJ's lawyers were successful in having some very convicting evidence against OJ thrown out of court. It likely would have brought a guilty verdict from the judge. But it could not be used as evidence. So when the judge's gavel finally dropped... the judge pronounced OJ **NOT GUILTY** of murder. A large number of those watching the trial were shocked. It was thought by most people that OJ Simpson was guilty. (And perhaps he **was**.) But it did not matter. He was pronounced not guilty. He was legally justified. ... As the law sees OJ... it is **just-as-if** he did not murder his wife.

Justified means "**Just-as-if-I**-did not do it." ... (Listen!) I am a guilty sinner – and you are too! But God made a legal declaration about me... so that in His eyes... it is "**Just-as-if-I**-did not." ... When ANY sinner trusts Christ... God declares him/her righteous... and that declaration will never change! God looks on us and deals with us as though we had never sinned at all!

Justification is something **God** does - not man. ... No sinner can justify himself before God. ... (And... most important)... justification does not mean that God **makes** us righteous... but that He **declares** us righteous. God puts the righteousness of Christ on our record - in the place of our own sinfulness.

Now... for this very strange-sounding and ancient word – “propitiation.” It is an ancient word... but it has modern uses. ... You know... I have to wonder how many flower shops today would go out of business if it was not for the concept of “propitiation.” ... It simply means “*to appease someone who is angry – usually with a gift.*” (A lot of husbands buy their wives flowers... as a propitiation... as a way to have them turn away their

wrath.) ... Ancient religions would often have their worshippers present an offering to an idol... in hopes that the supposed deity would not bring a drought... or famine... or some other natural disaster.

Jesus gave a propitiation to God the Father... and His anger about our sin has been turned away.

... .. [P a u s e]

So here are the three confusing terms that we will see in our passage.

“Redemption” which means to buy back with the only acceptable commodity... “justify” which means to be declared “**Just**-as-**if-I**-did not do it”... and “propitiation” which means to settle... calm... and satisfy someone’s anger.

And now... let’s go to our life-impacting passage of Scripture...

Romans 3:21-26

The points are these: (1) God has provided a righteousness of His own for men and women... a righteousness we do not possess ourselves... by showing how good we are; (2) this righteousness is made available to us by grace; that is, we do not deserve it and in fact are incapable ever of deserving it; (3) it is the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in dying on the cross... redeeming us (buying us back from our slavery to sin)... that has made this possible; and (4) the righteousness that God has graciously provided becomes ours through simple faith.

I want you to notice the two words that begins all of this good news (verse 21) – “But now...” ... What tremendous words they are! ... One Bible scholar who I was reading... calls them "*the great turning point*" in God's

dealings with the human race... and a turning point in the letter. ... Another writer calls them "*God's great 'nevertheless' in the face of man's failure.*"

You see... up to this point in Paul's letter to the Romans... the Apostle Paul has gone to great lengths to show how EVERYONE has sinned and stands condemned before God. Both the very religious people (and these were the Jews) and the very ungodly people (who Paul called "gentiles") – have **all** rejected God... suppressed His truth... and are **all** condemned. Suddenly Paul writes: "*But now...*"

"*But now...*" These words indicate that something of great importance has taken place. "But now a righteousness from God (apart from law) has been made known. ... **Before**(!)... .. the wrath of God was being revealed against us. ... But **Now** the righteousness of God is made known.

How are we to escape from our inevitable doom of being condemned to Hell? In ourselves we cannot. "*But now,*" says Paul... "*in place of wrath... a righteousness from God has been made known.*"

But now... because of Christ's work... there can be justification (a "never-changing declaration"... can be made ... that we are NOT GUILTY") rather than our current condemnation. ... There is justification "through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

You may not know much theology. Terms like "justification," "propitiation," and "redemption" may simply be a bunch of religious-sounding words... or perhaps vague generalities for you. But you know what your past life has been. You remember your past sins. You are aware of your failures.

Is that truly a **former**... (*past* state) for you? ... Can you say, "*That was true of me once. I really was like the person described in the first two and a half chapters of Romans. But that was before. **BUT NOW** Christ has come. He has saved me... and I have become an entirely new creature because of Him*"?

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones suggests a way by which you can test whether or not you are a true Christian... and by which you can reassure and strengthen yourself if you are:

When the devil attacks you and suggests to you that you are not a Christian... and that you have never been a Christian because of what is still in your heart... or because of what you are still doing... or because of something you once did — when he comes and so accuses you... what do you say to him?

Do you agree with him? ... Or do you say to him: "*Yes, that was true, but now...*"? Do you hold up these words against him? Do you remain lying on the ground in hopelessness... or do you lift up your head and say, "But now"?

You can... if you trust in Jesus and his death on your behalf. ... You can say... "*Once I was blind, but now I see*"... if you trust in Jesus and his death on your behalf. ... "*Once I was lost, but now I am found*" ... "*Once I was subject to the just wrath of God.. . But now I have been saved by Jesus... having received the gift of God's righteousness through faith in him*"!

... .. [P A U S E]

Now... for those of you who took Martyn Lloyd-Jones' test just now... and feel that you passed... Look into your own heart and see whether you are trusting... (even in a small fraction)... in something that you are doing for yourself... or that you are doing for God... (instead of finding in your heart that you have ceased from your works... and that you are resting ONLY on the work that was accomplished on the cross of Calvary.)

This is the secret of reality: **Righteousness apart from law**. ... (Or Righteousness apart from human doing.) ... Christianity is the faith that believes God's Word about the work **that is fully done**... completely done.... Righteousness without law. ... Righteousness apart from human character.

Marvel in God's great love for us! Folks... we are loved. Christian(!) Never stop marveling in it. Have you grown cold to these marvelous truths? ... Oh! May God re-ignite the flame in your soul. God is **Unimaginably kind!**

The story is told of a widow whose only daughter was very sick and in need of fresh fruit. ... But it was winter... grapes and oranges were expensive... and the widow was poor.

Walking the streets of the city... the woman found herself outside the royal palace. ... She looked through the gate and saw in the royal greenhouse great clusters of the most appetizing and tempting grapes. ... As she gazed at them wistfully... the princess came by and... taking in the situation at a glance... with her own hands cut for the widow a magnificent basketful of fruit.

With trembling hands the widow offered the royal lady in payment the few coppers she had in her purse... but she received instead this noble reply, "*Madam, these grapes are not for sale. My father is a king and he's much too rich to sell, and besides, you are much too poor to buy. You can have these grapes free or not at all.*"

That is our God! The story explains what our passage is telling us! We don't have what it takes to acquire what we all need... and besides... God does not sell. ... He offers salvation **free**... or not at all. ... How does a person obtain a righteous standing in God's eyes... worthy enough to escape Hell? ... It can only be received as a gift.

Salvation is free... but it is not cheap. The words "*by His blood*" in verse 25 tells us what the price was. ... Jesus had to die on the cross in order to satisfy the Law and justify us... as lost sinners. The means of soothing God's wrath... was by God directing it all toward His Son (Jesus.) God placed the full weight of the wrath that you and I deserved on Christ. He took our place... by dying **for us** (instead of us getting the punishment that we earned.)

When it comes to salvation... boasting is unthinkable! God did it all – not us. We have nothing that we can possibly boast about. This is a call for humility... and humility paves the way for the grace of God to deluge our bankrupt human hearts... and bring us life. ... This is where anyone who wants to be saved must begin. ... They must put down their pride and boasting... and come with empty hands... so that they can receive this radical... true...salvation.

Romans 3:27

The first part of our passage today explained - **HOW** we are saved. ... It ends now by explaining **WHY** we are saved in this way. (In short) It is so that God gets ALL the glory... every bit of it!

Why does God save us by faith alone? (1) Faith eliminates the pride of human effort, because faith is not a deed that we do. (2) Faith exalts what God has done, not what we do. (3) Faith admits that we can't keep the law or measure up to God's standards—we need help. (4) Faith is based on our relationship with God, not our performance for God.

The swimmer... when he is saved from drowning... does not brag because he trusted the lifeguard. ... What else could he do? When a believing sinner is justified by faith... he cannot boast of his faith. The only thing he can boast about is the wonderful God Who saved him.

Furthermore... ANYONE can be saved! Jew or non-Jew! (The Jews had been boasting about their special position with God.) ... But since there is only one God... salvation is the same for everyone. We are on equal footing. The circumcised (or the Jews) and the uncircumcised are both saved by this same faith. So no one can boast. Glory only belongs to God!

Romans 3:28-31

The Law is God's means of confronting and diagnosing our problem... we can never be good enough on our own. We need a savior – Jesus Christ. Turn to Him!

We are going to end our worship service today by taking communion together. I am praying that this will be a very special time for you... perhaps a communing with Christ like you have never experienced.

Scripture says that everyone who is saved by this faith that we have been looking at in Romans today... is “the Bride of Christ.” If you are a believer... you are part of His bride. So as we partake of the communion celebration... I am going to ask that you treat it... as though you are re-taking your wedding vows.

Maybe God is calling you to be part of the Bride of Christ for the first time through our passage today. If so... then... please join us as you make your vows to Him for the first time.

If you are ***not*** ready to commit your life to Christ... as a husband and wife do at their wedding... then please do not participate with the rest of us. Let this just be a sacred moment between Christ and His bride. Please don't make a mockery... and take these elements in an unworthy manner.)

... .. [P A U S E]

Now... believers(!)... I will lead you in communion celebration... in the same fashion that I usually do. We will observe this ordinance with the same wording and actions that is our custom. But I am going to ask you to take a moment (and as best as you can) treat this like a wedding vow.

In your mind's eye... look up into Jesus' face and repeat the words... . "I, [whoever you are; add your own name], take thee, Jesus, to be my loving Savior and Lord; and I do promise and covenant, before God the Father and these witnesses, to be thy loving and faithful wife: in plenty and in

want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, for this life and for all eternity."

Then understand that God the Father (not an earthly minister) will then pronounce the marriage... and you become (or remain) the Lord Jesus Christ's forever.

Have you done that? Have ever come to Christ and placed your faith in what He has done for you? Have you received His redemption... His justification... and His propitiation...? Do you know yourself to have been made His forever?

You may say, "*Well, I do not know if I have or not.*"

If you do not know... settle the matter right now. ... For most wedding services today... there are months of preparation during which a church and minister are selected... a guest list is drawn up... clothes are purchased... a license is procured... and many other details are handled.

But nothing remains to be done before you are able to make your commitment to Christ. ... He has done it all. ... The Father is there. The wedding is prepared. ... All you must do now is say your vow to him. You must believe and follow Jesus.