

Romans 3:21 - But Now.....

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[0 : 0 0] Well, tonight I want us to spend a little bit of time in the wonderful chapter that is Romans 3, and in particular we can read again at 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, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ, for all who believe, 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. And as I'm sure you can tell from the bulletin, our focus in many ways is going to be on the very first words of these verses, just the first two words, but now. The letter to the Romans is an amazing letter and it is full of wonderful teaching and many of the great truths of Christianity are explained with clarity and splendor in this letter.

And many, many people can spend many profitable hours studying this letter and finding many great things. So Romans is an amazing letter, but I have to be honest and say that for a long time I found Romans quite hard to read and what I found was you could read it and you would find verses here and there which you could take out and were very encouraging, but I struggled to follow the train of thought that was going through the whole letter. Now maybe you have never found that difficult, but if you have found it difficult then I can understand how you felt because I think the combination of my own weakness and also the fact that there is just so much in this letter.

You're reading through it and it's almost too much to take in. And this passage that we've just read Romans 3-21-26 is one of the most amazing passages of all and it is full of amazing teaching, but in order to understand it better we have to recognise that these words come at the end of an argument that began all the way back in chapter 1. From the middle of chapter 1 right through to this point Paul is building things up and building things up and we're going to look at that path from chapter 1 right through to chapter 3 for a wee while together tonight and I hope that as we do so we will be able to see more of the amazing grace of God in Jesus Christ. So we're kind of taking a maybe a broad approach to the first three chapters and then hopefully focusing in on these verses. I won't be able to cover every detail of Romans 1-3 but I hope we can just see the direction that Paul is moving in. In order to do that we're going to just ask a few questions and the first question is a very simple one. What is Romans all about? That's a really good question to ask of any book of the Bible and it's great if you can have a two or three-cented summary of what a book of the Bible is about. What is Romans about? Well the answer to that question is in chapter 1 verses 16 and 17. Paul says, for I am not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith as it is written the righteous shall live by faith. What's

Romans all about? Romans is all about the gospel the good news of Jesus Christ and in many ways these two verses introduce the whole book because Paul is Saint and not ashamed of the gospel and then he spends the rest of the book explaining how that gospel works and at the heart of the gospel is this concept of God's righteousness. Now I may have said this a few times before but it's worth saying again that God's righteousness to understand what we mean by that is good to understand to think of that as the idea of God's standards God's moral standard of perfection he has his standards he has his norms if you like and they are at a level of perfection he never compromises he never fails to meet his standards God's righteousness is like his line that he never crosses he is who he is. Now that of course points us straight back to what the Old Testament says in terms of the name of God I am who I am I am righteous I have my standards there are things that I am there are things that I am not and Paul is saying in the gospel the righteousness of

God is revealed that's what he says in verse 17 the righteousness of God is revealed and that's an important phrase remember that phrase because we'll come back to it. So Paul is saying in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed that brings up the next question how is the righteousness of God revealed and Paul answers that in the next three chapters and he basically says there are two ways in which God's righteousness is revealed the first way is discussed from the very next verse verse 18 and chapter 1 all the way through to chapter 3 verse 20 that's the first way that God's righteousness is revealed what is that way verse 18 tells us God's righteousness is revealed in his wrath the right the wrath of God is revealed from heaven and so remember we're looking at a big a big chunk of argument here what Paul says in Romans 3 21 onwards is following on from what he says in verse 18 about the wrath of God now it's really important to grasp this the wrath of God does not imply that God is unfair or that he is unjust or that he is unrighteous some people think that the idea of wrath is like God is all unfair and harsh the wrath of God does not reveal that

[7 : 26] God is unfair it reveals the very opposite it reveals that he is righteous in fact it reveals that he's far more righteous than we often realize God's wrath is the fact that he has these standards and he has a holy anger and aversion to anything that is wrong to anything that fails to meet these standards that's why Romans 1 18 goes on to say the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against what against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men again think about that in terms of righteous standard his wrath is revealed against anything that fails to meet that standard that fails to conform to what God is it is the ungodliness and the unrighteousness of humanity that provokes God's wrath and that makes perfect sense God is who he is therefore he cannot compromise when it comes to righteousness so God's wrath shows us that God is righteous it is revealing the righteousness of God I think a good way to illustrate this is to think of a judge think of a judge in court he has got a criminal who is unquestionably found guilty when that judge hands down the sentence what does the judge reveal he reveals that he is committed to doing what is right he's showing a righteousness and so Paul's first point is that God's righteousness has been revealed through God's wrath and he then gives a really insightful analysis of how all this has happened and that's what he kind of goes through in the rest of chapter 1 chapter 2 in the beginning of chapter 3 first of all he looks at the world as a whole and he says that the reality of God is known to everybody for what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them his invisible attributes namely his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived since the creation of the world in the things that have been made so they are without excuse he's saying people can see even by looking at the world that there is a God but people have suppressed this truth Paul goes on to say they've pushed God away and they worship the created rather than the creator and I don't need to prove to any of you that that is true we're surrounded by people in the world who instead of worshiping the creator they worship the creature they worship themselves or some other created thing whether it's money or football or pleasure or success or whatever people do that of course we have to always ask ourselves am I doing that am I worshiping a creature instead of the creator Paul then goes on to say that because people are determined to rebel against God he lets them verse 26 of chapter 1 for this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passion and this is a vital point because it says God will not stop it tells us that God will not stop people from rebelling against him God is not a dictator who forces us to be loyal to him if people are going to rebel persistently against God he will let them have their own way and in doing so God

is simply being fair if someone wants to push God away then they'll get what they want and that's a very very solemn thought for us all and it's worth pausing here because at this point we find the answer to one of life's biggest questions so often people look at the world and they see everything that's wrong in the world and they say why why is the world so bad and the answer is if humanity is wanting to get its own way God will allow them and that makes perfect sense if the world chooses the path of unrighteousness God cannot go with him because he is righteous he will never be unrighteous and that's why the world is in a mess and if you read you can go home and read the rest of chapter 1 Romans 1 18 to 32 it is probably the most accurate sociological summary of modern

Britain the world has gone its own way and we have done our own thing in that we reveal our unrighteousness but we also reveal God's righteousness because he is not going to endorse what we do now there are many many examples of this and I know that we could mention many things about our nation but I saw one example this week that that really quite left me quite amazed and some of you will have seen in the news the politician Tam Diel passed away this this week and I don't know much about Tam Diel at all I just recognized his name so I read his obituary on the BBC News website and the very last sentence of that website said this he was that rare thing among politicians a man who stuck to his principles regardless of how unpopular it made him and when

I read that I was flabbergasted if sticking to your principles is a rare thing among the leaders of our nation then God help us what Paul says in Romans 1 is describing today almost word for word so just to recap Paul at the end of chapter 1 is looking at the whole world and he's saying even though the world knows that a god it's choosing to push him away in chapter 2 Paul makes the focus much more personal you can look at chapter 1 of Romans and you can say oh yes the world is an awful place and it's in a mess but in chapter 2 Paul says what about you verse 1 therefore you have no excuse oh man every one of you who judges for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself because you the judge practice the very same things we can look at the world and stand in judgment over and say oh yes look at that mess but Paul is saying what about you what about me and the basic question that Paul is asking in chapter 2 is how do you match up to God's law now when you hear the word law you should be thinking of the word righteous remember God's standard his righteous standard that is set and explained to us in God's law the law reveals God's righteous standards and it's failure to reach those standards that justly and fairly provokes God's wrath therefore the vital question is how do we match up to God's law and Paul emphasizes a vital point because he highlights the fact that the answer to the question how do we match up to God's law is not found in what we say the answer is found in what we do 233 it's not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God but the doer of the law who will be justified Paul again is highlighting God is fair he's righteous if someone cannot be God's law perfectly then he will live if someone can conform to everything that God's law requires then God would have nothing against him because he would not be a sinner Paul is saying God is perfectly fair and so that brings up the next question which is basically well does such a person exist has anybody kept the law perfectly both inwardly and outwardly in particular this question applies to the Jews because they were the ones to whom the law was given they had the law they boasted in the law they love the fact that they were the people of God's law but did they keep it did anyone keep it and that brings us into chapter 3 which is basically asking the question who then is righteous and the answer is no one as it is written none is righteous no not one no one understands no one seeks for

God all have turned aside together they become worthless no one does good not even one their throat is an open grave they use their tongues to deceive the venom of astus in their lips under their lips their mouth is full of curses and bitterness their feet are swiftly shed blood in their paths are ruin and misery and the way of peace they have not known there is no fear of God before their eyes it's as if Paul has surveyed the whole world from chapter 1 through to chapter 3 and he says absolutely no one is righteous and for that reason the very next verse says that every mouth is stopped we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God to God it's interesting at the start of chapter 3 and if you read back you can read it later on and Paul lists potential excuses from people it says the Jews had the articles of God but some people rebelled does that mean that God's unfaithful another excuse if our unrighteousness reveals the righteousness of

[19:06] God is God being unfair if I lie so that truth abounds is God being unfair to punish me all these excuses Paul is saying there is no excuse remember his question is this how do you compare to the law of God and he summarizes the answer to that question in the next verse verse 20 where he says by the works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight since through the law comes knowledge of sin if you compare yourself to the law you will find that there is none righteous no not one and so to sum up the argument from Romans 1 18 all the way through to Romans 3 20 it is saying God's righteousness has been revealed in his wrath that wrath is provoked by our unrighteousness his standards have been shown in his law and if we ask how do we compare do we have any excuses the answer is no our mouths are shut God is righteous and we most definitely are not so

God's righteousness has been revealed and our condition and the condition of the whole world before him is incredibly bleak and what does Paul say next well here's where these two words are amazing because Paul says but now and these two words are two of the most important words the world has ever ever heard because our unrighteousness leaves humanity totally condemned and the righteousness of God revealed in his wrath reveals leaves us with no excuse whatever and on that basis alone we are without hope if the world was just left as it was it would carry on doing its own thing all the way to eternity in hell but these two words but now they tell us that God is not finished remember back at the start we said that Paul is describing two ways in which his righteous in which God's righteousness is revealed the first was through his wrath but now there is another way and that's what these verses are saying but now the righteousness of God has been manifested revealed apart from the law there's another way although the law and the prophets bear witness to it the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe for there's 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 Paul is saying that God's righteousness has been revealed in a different way this way is not through the law or through the wrath provoked by it although as he says the law and the prophets pointed us towards it but this is revealed through faith in Jesus Christ and that means the question is no longer how do you compare to the law because in terms of that question there's no distinction all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God but now Paul is saying that the righteousness of God has been revealed through faith in Jesus and how does that work well the key phrase is in verse 24 where it says it is revealed it is that we are justified by his grace as a gift and Paul's point is this on our own God's righteousness exposes our unrighteousness that's his standard we don't need it but God is saying I will reveal my righteousness in another way I will credit you as righteous as a gift in other words God is saying you have no hope whatsoever of earning my righteousness therefore I will give it to you

I will give it to you and you think yourself how can God do that well Paul then goes and explains how God does that I don't actually have the verses up but if you if you look in the text you can see God put forward his son as a propitiation by his blood as a sacrifice to turn away the wrath of God Jesus took our place the wrath that we deserve was placed on him and the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ is given to us it is all a gift that's exactly what grace is a gift that is totally undeserved and as Paul goes on to say all of this is the new way of showing God's righteousness this is to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he'd passed over former sins it was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus and really it is all summed up by these two words but now Paul is saying that because of Jesus everything is different the world has rejected God sin has caused havoc as we go our own way every single person is tangled up in this mess no one absolutely no one has any hope of being good enough on their own no one is righteous but now because of Jesus there is hope for every single one of us and that's why good news Paul gives two and a half chapters of bad news from verse 18 of chapter one onwards but then he says but now there's good news and I really really hope we can grasp the wonder of these words because they're emphasizing the glory of what we have in front of us in the gospel the world is desperately sick in sin and you only have to look at the world to see that it's evidencing itself in so many ways but now we have a cure a cure that can heal all the damage that sin has caused the world is pushing God away people we know are pushing God away maybe you have pushed God away in your life maybe you're still pushing God away but now there's a way back there's a way back you think of all the people who have pushed God away pushed God away pushed God away and yet God says there's a way back that's what the prodigal son experienced he pushed his father away he went as far away as he could but now there's a way back once we were helpless helpless lost unable to conform to God's law unable to be righteous in ourselves totally helpless but now we have everything we need everything that we need for our salvation is ours in Jesus Christ the world had no hope whatsoever of earning salvation and virtually

every other religion in the world is trying to see the same thing that we can work our way back up to God and we can't the world has no hope of earning salvation but now it is offered as a gift God says I will give it to you and we have all gone wrong in our lives but now God is putting everything right through Jesus Christ and that's why the gospel is so wonderful and why it's such good news it is the power of God unto salvation God is using his power to save you and it is the gift of God for salvation God is freely openly and lovingly offering this to us and sometimes we have to make sure that we cling on to these two words if you're a Christian cling on to these two words because they remind you of the amazing change that has happened in your life our testimony as

Christians is one great expression of these two words but now I was once lost just like you but now I have been found I was once blind but now I can see I was once broken but now I am healed I was once dead but now I am alive that's the testimony of every child of God but now everything is different because of Jesus and if you are not yet a Christian or if you are seeking the Lord or not to do about things I want you to lay hold of these words as well because God is saying in these words that without him without Christ we are lost if we compare ourselves to the law we cannot match up on our own we are all unrighteous God is wanting us to know that but he is also saying but now I will give you my righteousness but now I will justify you but now I will save you I will make you my own and please see the importance of the word now because it emphasizes that your past does not stop you because we can easily come to God and say but I we have the offer of the gospel and we say but I am a failure but I don't understand enough but I am nowhere near good enough but I might not keep it up

[31 : 57] God is saying to you I know all of that I know your past but now you can trust in me and I will give you everything the world is full of so much that is wrong so many things that are wrong but the amazing truth of the Christian gospel is that there is a but now but now God will give you and give me everything that we need through Jesus Christ I hope every single one of us can say I was once lost but now God has saved me Amen let us pray