**Lesson 8: God Provided Righteousness**

Text: Romans 3:21-31

**Introduction**

“But now” in Romans 3:21 are two of the most powerful and welcome words in the Bible. Paul begins a new focus at this verse. The need for righteousness has been presented (1:18-3:20). Now, the way to receive righteousness is explained. God’s provision of righteousness occupies a good portion of his letter and will take us several weeks to unpack the rich spiritual truths that are contained therein. Our study of Romans takes us from the depths of depravity to the heights of what it means to be in Christ Jesus. The same Bible that presents our guilt, also presents the plan of salvation. Because the extent of man’s sin was so great, there was no way that he could justify himself before God. There must be another way of justification. In this lesson, we will begin to analyze what it means to be declared righteous by God. I believe you will find reason to rejoice in God’s provision of righteousness.

1. **It may be helpful to define a few terms before we venture into the verses.** 
   1. Justify/justification – “To announce a favorable verdict, to declare righteous” (Ryrie); “to be acquitted by God from all charges that could be brought against a person because of his or her sins” (Moo). Thus, it is a change in your standing before God from unrighteous to righteous!
   2. Redemption – “literally, as an action, a buying back of a slave or captive through payment of a ransom” (Friberg); to set free through the payment of a price.
   3. Propitiation – “the place where sins are forgiven by means of the blood from an atoning sacrifice” (Friberg). “The turning away of the wrath of God because of the offering of Christ” (Ryrie).
2. **While the Jews were insistent on establishing their own righteousness by the law, God made righteousness available apart from the law. (v. 21-24)**
   1. The *righteousness of God* in verse 21 refers to God’s gift of righteousness to the repentant sinner. The law and the prophets testify to a righteousness that comes from God as a free gift to all who will believe.
   2. You receive this righteousness at the moment that you place faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. (v. 22) Since there is no difference in the fact of man’s sinfulness, there is no difference in God’s plan of salvation. It is available to all who will believe.
   3. All have broken God’s commandments and continue to fall short of God’s glory. (v. 23)
   4. Since there was nothing that man could do to save himself, he is justified freely by God’s grace. (v. 24)
      1. Grace is God’s unmerited favor.
      2. Since it is on the basis of grace on God’s part, then it MUST be received by faith on man’s part.
      3. It is free for us at a great price to God!
3. **The Father maintained His righteous character and provided righteousness to mankind through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. (v. 25-26)** 
   1. The focus shifts at this verse from how a person receives a right standing before God to what God did to make it possible.
   2. The righteousness described in verses 25-26 is different than the righteousness in verses 21-22. Here it refers to God’s righteous character. How could a holy, righteous God declare a sinner righteous without compromising His own righteousness?
   3. The Father set forth (publicly displayed) Jesus to be the propitiation for our sins. The word *propitiation* is connected to the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant (Heb. 9:4-5). The Ark was a sacred chest that contained the Ten Commandments, Aaron’s rod, and a pot of manna. It was located in the most holy place of the Tabernacle and later the Temple. Two angelic beings made of gold spread their wings over the lid. The lid was known as the *mercy seat* or the place of atonement. It was literally the place of propitiation (covering). It was the meeting place between God and man.
   4. On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest brought the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkled it upon the mercy seat. Thus, the blood of the innocent sacrifice covered the broken commandments! It symbolized that God looked upon the blood and had mercy upon His people.
   5. Thus, God passed over their sin year by year. The blood of the sacrifices postponed God’s judgment on sin until the perfect sacrifice for sin could be made. Jesus paid the full, complete payment for sin.
   6. In the Old Testament, the mercy seat was hidden from public view behind the veil. In the New Testament, Jesus was publicly set forth as the propitiation for our sins. Additionally, when Jesus died, the veil separating the Most Holy Place from the rest of the Temple was torn into two pieces from the top to the bottom. This symbolized that the way into God’s presence has once and for all been accomplished through the blood of the perfect sacrifice, the Lord Jesus Christ. A relationship with God is possible through faith in His blood (Romans 5:9; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:20).
   7. God remained righteous and He extended righteousness to sinful man through Jesus Christ. (v. 26) He is just, and the justifier of all who believe!
4. **Neither Jews nor Gentiles are saved by their own good works, but rather by faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. (v. 27-31)** 
   1. This leaves no grounds for boasting. (v. 27) Salvation is not a human achievement!
   2. A person is declared right with God by faith without works. (v. 28)
   3. This is true for Gentiles, just as it is for the Jews. (v. 29-30)
   4. This truth does not invalidate the law. (v. 31) Rather, Christ’s sinless life and sacrificial death fulfilled the righteous demands of the law.
      1. When a set of blueprints are used to build a house, they are not rendered void once the house is built. Rather, they are fulfilled! The law has been fulfilled by Christ. (C.S. Lovett)
      2. The law continues to serve its purpose in showing men their need of Christ. (Galatians 3:24)
5. **Central Idea: Paul explained that a person is declared right with God on the basis of faith in Christ’s finished work.**
6. **Application: You can be declared right with God by placing faith in Christ’s finished work.** 
   1. Jesus’ death on the cross does not mean that everyone has been saved, but that anyone can be saved.
   2. Righteousness is not up to you! There is no amount of good works that could clear your record before God. Righteousness must be received, since it cannot be earned. Have you trusted Jesus’ finished work ALONE for your salvation?
   3. As we gather today, consider the price paid for your redemption. It will change the way you sing praise to the Lord! It will cause you to humbly bow before the Lord in gratitude.
   4. Take time to read through a gospel tract provided by our church. You will find a simplistic explanation as to how a person is able to stand before God with righteousness. Use the tract to bring others to Christ.

**Conclusion**

Such a wonderful truth is simple to understand, yet difficult to summarize in one lesson. Perhaps that is why we have four gospels, the history of those whose lives were changed by this truth in Acts, and the numerous letters to churches who believed this monumental truth. This is also why countless songs, poems, sermons, and tracts have been written to communicate this great truth. If the Lord tarries His coming, there be countless songs and messages written to celebrate this great truth! If the Lord returns, celebration will be moved to His very presence! The fact that God provided righteousness truly gives us reason to rejoice.