

- REFORMATION -

Small group questions

Romans 3:21-26 – A righteousness from God

Leaders – if the questions make no sense or you don't know the answer – please contact the preacher!

From Mark: *There is no way I'd expect any group to get through all these this week!*

Leaders – choose the questions that will be best for those in your group to discuss.

1. Have you had the experience of being in a relationship with someone where you could *never* do anything right?
2. Why did Martin Luther feel he could never do enough to get right with God? What impact did that have on him?
3. "From God", "through faith", "freely" and "hilasterion". Explore these key concepts Mark took us through in the message and check that everyone understands the concept and the implication.
4. Righteousness = 'right-standing'. Some Christians find it near impossible to think of themselves as 'righteous'. What factors might hinder such a person's full assurance that they are indeed 'righteous'? How might you help them to appreciate Paul's wonderful truth more fully?
5. Someone reading Rom 3:22 may conclude: "Great! As long as I simply have 'faith in Jesus', it doesn't really matter how I live – I'm still right with God." How might you helpfully respond to someone who has arrived at this conclusion?
6. "Justified," "redemption" and "atonement" are words rarely used in contemporary conversation. Without using any religious terminology, try to explain each of these concepts in a way that a non-churched person might appreciate?
7. Verse 24 speaks of being "justified freely by his grace ..." When and how did the message of God's GRACE really sink in for you?
8. From the sermon: "Freely, and as a favour, God grants us right standing in his presence". For those who have been Christians for a long time these great truths can sometimes be taken for granted. How we might avoid ever becoming blasé about the teaching of Rom 3:21-26?
9. A non-Christian friend overhears you talking about Jesus' death and states: "That's horrible! What sort of God needs a blood sacrifice before he forgives? If I were God, I'd just let everyone into heaven for free." Avoiding jargon, what might you graciously say in response?
10. Someone you know has always struggled to feel they could be accepted by God. From the insights of this passage and message, what would encourage them to do, so they can be assured of their 'right-standing' with God?
11. "Do not merely listen to the word...do what it says." James 1:22. What things might we need to Start; Stop; Continue... as a result of what you have learned through this week's sermon and discussion?

Date: 29 October 2017
Services: 730, 930 Tewanin, 5pm Cooroy
Series: Reformation
Passage: Romans 3:21-26 (p 1114)
Title: A righteousness that is by faith
Outline: Martin Luther was dying inside
The words which gave life:
"From God"
"Through Faith"
"Freely"
"Hilasterion"

have you ever been in a relationship with someone, where you felt you could never do anything right?

Perhaps you had a strained relationship with your parents... and especially through those teenage years - nothing you did was right.

Maybe it was a tyrannical boss at work... or supervisor at uni...

Maybe it was your church minister (I hope not!!)... who not matter what you did, you could seem to make happy.

And those times when you worked **particularly** hard to win approval or get in their good books... somehow, you only seemed to make things **worse**.

And you became almost **obsessed** with making this person happy - but nothing - no piece of **work** - no helpful **attitude** - no submissive **behaviour**, seemed to make a scrap of difference. /

Now the toll that takes after a while is significant.

You lose all your sense of **self-worth**; you think **you're** the problem... though you can't work out why...

You become **exhausted**... **down-hearted**... you lose your passion for **trying**... some - **depression** or **self-harm!** //

Now imagine that was the way you understood you and God?

Imagine that you felt that try as you might, you could **never** please God?

That he was an **angry** God - ready to pounce with his **judgement**... eager to catch you **out** - **keen** to keep you from **eternity** with him....

Martin Luther was a Roman Catholic monk and priest 1517 - 500 years ago.

Very catholic and **very** dedicated.

But he was **torn up**, trying to be the best he could possibly be.

He was **conscientious**. Concerned for his **purity**.

He would often go to his confessor and confess his sins... **so** often in fact that his confessor said once - "Martin - either do something really big worth confessing - or stop coming and bothering me with all these *little* things!"

He was hyper-diligent with **reading, prayers, confessions**, with **mass**.

Yet he lived in constant **fear** of God. He was scared of God's **judgement** and spending eternity away from God's presence.

He was constantly aware of the **frequency** and **severity** of his sin.

When he read about the righteousness of God, all he saw was **God** punishing a sinner such as him.

"I did not love God", he said – "I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. I was angry with God – because we were born with original sin – than crushed by the 10 commandments... which were impossible to keep!"

Luther came to realise that all the **confessions**, all his **tears**, all the times he went to **Mass**, all his **prayers**, his **devotion**, the good things he did as a Monk... **none** of that made him righteous.

Not keeping the **10 commandments**, not observing the **Sabbath**, not exceeding the **expectations** nor outdoing the **diligence** of **other** monks... no **self-loathing**, or **hail-Marys** or "**our Fathers...**" *nothing* worked... **nothing** gave him **confidence** or **assurance** or **peace**...

"My conscience would never give me assurance", he later told his students, "but I was always doubting and said, "You did not perform that correctly. You were not contrite enough. You left that out of your confession". //

Martin Luther was **dying** inside.

A **God** he couldn't **please**

A holy **life** he couldn't **live**

A **standard** he could never **meet**

A **judgement** he could not **escape**.

until...

...until he read these words from **Romans 1:17** – *For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith"*.

Imagine... committing your whole life to the church as a **priest** and **monk**... making vows of **poverty**, **chastity** and **obedience**...

...doing **everything** your church tells you – but it's never **enough**, and you feel like a **failure** all day, **every** day...

...only to discover – only to discover – the **Bible**!! – and to discover *from* the Bible that your church has got it entirely wrong...!

and instead of **freeing** people it's "Gospel" has **enslaved** people... ///

but now – suddenly - you're seeing for the first time why the Gospel **is** actually GOOD NEWS!

...because **righteousness** – that is – the state of being **right with God** – **in right relationship with God** – is something that is

1. from God...
2. by faith –
3. given freely; on the basis of –
4. hilasterion.

We're going to spend a little time now unpacking these words/concepts which brought life to Martin Luther.

1. FROM GOD

Let's have a look together now at Romans 3:21ff where the Apostle Paul spells out further the concept he had only introduced in Chapter 1.

v21 *But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and Prophets testify.*

Unlike today, the word 'righteousness' in Biblical thought does not mean 'good' or 'moral'; it means 'in right standing' with God.

If a minister comes from another Diocese into our diocese, they need to provide, from their bishop, a letter stating that they are a clergy person 'in good standing' with their bishop.

To enjoy a relationship with God now... to be **assured** of where you stand – to be **confident** of your **forgiveness**... you need to be in '**right standing**' with God.

When you stand before God either when you leave this life or on the day Jesus returns, you'll need a letter (as it were) to show you are in good standing with – in right relationship with God.

Guess who is going to provide that letter?

Not me as your minister – that is for sure!

No that letter, Luther discovered from Romans – **God himself provides**.... “apart from law” ... not by **law-keeping**... not by **rituals, rules or regulations**....

No... the status of being **right** with God (righteous), is entirely and **ONLY – FROM GOD!!**

Furthermore, it is

2. THROUGH FAITH

Have a look with me.... v22 *this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.*

This way of being right with God is **from God**, and we take **hold** it... we **receive** it... by faith.

Now faith sounds like one of those complicated religious words... it is in fact much misunderstood.

People think of it as something they have to muster up – like believing 6 impossible things before breakfast... //

But faith is not believing something you doubt is **true**

Faith is not believing despite evidence to the **contrary**

Faith is not believing that for which there is no **credible evidence**... /

Faith is simply **trust**...

When you trust your spouse or a good friend... that trust develops not on the first meeting when you don't know a thing about them...

... it develops as you get to **know** someone... as you learn from experience that they are trust-worthy... /
this is what faith is... /

we could read this – that righteousness comes from God by trusting in Jesus Christ for all who **trust**...

Faith in Jesus Christ means **belief** about Jesus, **trust** in Jesus and **devotion** to Jesus. ///

So - a way of being right with God has been revealed which is

From God

Through faith

and it is given

3. FREELY

Back to our passage – v22 – half way through – *There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.*

Everyone has sinned – Jew and Gentile alike – done their own thing.... BUT the possibility of being in ‘right standing’ with God is also open to everyone – Jew and Gentile alike!

The offer to be justified **freely** by God's grace... is there for *all*.

‘justified’ is simply the verb form of the word righteousness.

We could read that everyone can be righteous-ified freely by his grace... //

Here is the mystery of Christianity, a mystery you will find in no other world religion....

God puts us in right-standing with himself – he ‘justifies’ us – **free of charge**.

It happens says v24 – *freely by his grace*...

Just **one** of those words (freely or grace) would have been enough – but Paul uses both ‘freely’ **and** ‘grace’ because he doesn't want anyone in **Rome** or **Noosa** to miss the point!

If you miss **this**, you miss what distinguishes Christianity from all religion.

We are declared by God to be 'righteous', 'freely', // that is, without a **moral** or religious **fee**.

The word used here for 'freely' is actually the technical Greek word for 'no payment'.

This '**no payment**'-righteousness comes, adds Paul, by God's 'grace', or sheer 'favour'.

Freely, as a favour, God grants us right standing in his presence. //

Perhaps you came here this morning like Martin Luther

Desperately wanting to get on God's good side, but fearing you **never** will.

If you're sitting here this morning wondering if you're *ever* going to be good enough to be accepted by God, let me help you out and say, **NO! NEVER!**

...but if you place your "faith in Jesus Christ" God will **gift** you with a right standing before him.

Regardless, of your **sin**, no matter what is in your **past** - or in your **present** - you will be "**justified** - made right with him - freely by his grace." ////

Free that is for **you**; costly for **Jesus!**

...because your right-standing with God - was possible only - v24- *through the redemption* or rescue *that came by Christ Jesus*.

That is - our change in status from standing **condemned** in God's courtroom - into the **joy** of right-standing with the eternal Judge himself - is the **ultimate 'redemption'** - the ultimate **rescue** story - and it came by **Jesus Christ**....

How did he effect this rescue?

What did Jesus do that manages to so dramatically change our status from '**condemned**' to being in '**right-standing**'?

Last word

4. HILASTERION

How can the one true judge of the world, become the one who declares sinners like us; **righteous**?

This is what vv25-26 are all about.

25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- 26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus

God presented Christ Jesus - as a 'sacrifice of atonement'.

The word translated 'sacrifice of atonement' is hilasterion.

In the Old Testament, it refers to one thing and one thing only - the most sacred **item** in the most sacred **room** of the **sacred Jerusalem temple**. /

On just one day of the ancient Jewish year - the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur - the High Priest of Israel sacrificed a bull and a goat for the sins of the Jewish people.

He then entered this special room in the temple precinct, called the Holy of Holies, and sprinkled some of the blood of the animals on a solid gold plate about a metre long and 60cm wide.

At this sacred spot, God met with the High Priest and atonement for the sins of Israel was made.

in that moment and in that very place God accepted the sacrifice as a **substitute**, for the punishment due to his sinful people.

This gold plate was called the 'atonement cover' - the *hilasterion*.

So what Paul says here is clear and beautiful - amazing!

God presented **Jesus** to the **world** as the one **true 'atonement cover'**

Christ's death on the cross, is the **substitute** God accepts in place of the judgment **due** to a **sinful world**.

Jesus on the cross, bore the wrath of God so that you and I, by trusting him, could receive the gift of **right-standing** with God. ///

Is God **soft** on us then – has he simply let us off the hook?

No – because his judgement has fallen on **Jesus** – the one who is **God** in the **flesh**!

He **punishes**, but he does so in a way that allows him at the **same time** to **rescue** his beloved **guilty world**; free of **charge**. //

Like a judge who issues a **fine**, only to graciously pay it **himself**... ///

Martin Luther – the 16th century priest and monk was dying inside... trying to get right with God entirely through his own efforts.

But then he read something which changed his whole understanding – that a righteousness *from God* is revealed... a righteousness which is

From God

Through faith

Freely given

Through the **rescue** of Jesus – our **hilasterion** – our **atonement cover** //

What a difference this change in understanding made for Luther!!

He said; “Here I felt I was born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates...”

So no more **guilt**... no more labouring by his own **efforts**... only **trusting** God... and **revelling** in what he has done. //

And with that realisation... the stirrings of **revolution** – of **reformation** began!!

are **you** in “right-standing” with God?

Maybe you’ve joined us this morning as a **guest** or **visitor** – or even a **regular** – but you’ve **never** been sure of where you stand with God...

I often hear from people – “I could never be good enough...” or “God wouldn’t welcome me!”....

I’m here to tell you this morning – you’re totally **right** – you could **never** be good enough – you **will** never be good enough...

...but I want you to discover this morning the joy of knowing that you can leave this building **knowing** you are right with God...

because a means of being in **right-standing** with God has been revealed in the gospel... which has **nothing** to do with **your** best efforts – but which rests on the **rescue** of **Jesus**... //

...because he **died** on the **cross** and **took** your **sin** --Jesus your hilasterion; – if you **trust** Jesus and that rescue – then will be considered to be in **right-standing** with God... //

will today – come to God and say ‘I give up – I can’t do it – I can’t get right with you on my own efforts...’ and come in trust and surrender to say – I trust you, I receive your freely given rescue... thank you...? Then **today**, you will leave here **righteous** – in right standing with God! ///

And if you’ve known this for a long time – live like it. Live lives of **joy**, of **faithfulness**... leave this building/come to communion this morning with joy written all over your face...

...go and live such **distinctive** lives of **confidence** in your **right-standing** that people start asking **questions**...

tell **others**...

revel in the **freedom**... //

because now, a righteousness **from God**, apart from **law** has been **made known**!