

March 21, 2021 - David Vinyard

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Preacher: David Vinyard

[0:00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church. Knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. Alright, good morning.

I'm not on, so let me make sure this is coming through. Here we go. Sounds hot? Yeah? Perfect. Hope everybody's doing well. It's good to be at the end of winter, right?

All that rain last week, kind of the reminder that that's over. I did wear winter socks, but they'll go away after this. It's nice. It's spring for some.

Let me get my tablet fired up here. Spring for some, it's a reminder of spring break. It can mean new life. If you're a pessimist, it might mean yard work and allergies or whatever else you think of spring. Like I said, spring break, March madness. In the Vineyard House, we're doing a little bit of both this week. My wife is on a trip and I've got the maniacs, so we've got the March madness and the spring getaway covered.

[1:05] You know, far be it from us to abstain from anything. But no, it's been good. A lot to look forward to on the Bethel calendar just in the new year. And even in the study of Romans, it's been a good study.

It's been a lot of refreshing truths and things that I think have been new to me as well. So to get us in that mood, in that direction, a little bit of a Roman theme here.

Try a little bit of humor. This will probably go the way that all my other jokes go. But so two friends are walking in the park and one says to the other, hey, did you hear that they're trying to do away with Roman numerals?

The other friend says, uh-uh, not on my watch. All right. Yeah. Yeah. I'm impressed, though. I thought that would take a second.

So you guys have had your cup of coffee. All right. I got another one, unfortunately. So what was the only thing that could divide the Roman Empire?

[2:02] A pair of Caesars. Caesar. Yep. That's the sound. I know it. It's the sympathy giggle, otherwise known as the charity chuckle.

And it's my unofficial cue to move on. So here we go. We are going to be picking up today's study at the end of Romans 3. I do not have a handout. And it's not because I didn't have time.

I just did not do it. So I apologize there. But we're looking at the end of Romans 3, beginning of chapter 4. If you want to turn there. And if you've missed a couple weeks or if it's a little fuzzy in your mind, here's a little background on the Roman church, the recipients of Paul's letter.

So we're told elsewhere in the book that when he wrote these folks, they had been in existence for a couple years. So they're not a brand new group, if that makes sense. They seem to be organized, somewhat well-grounded.

It says later on in Romans 15 that they're filled with knowledge and able to admonish one another. So just kind of setting the tone of who's receiving some of these words here. It was a group whose faith was pretty widely renowned.

[3:13] It says in chapter 1, verse 8, that their reputation kind of preceded them. But it was a relatively large group, maybe even the largest. So, you know, just kind of building who this assembly is.

They had a very large Jewish element. And they also had a large Gentile element. So they had a really good mix. And that includes converts from pagan religions, potentially free people, potentially slaves.

And maybe because the company I work for, maybe just the theme of the time, I got to thinking, you know, if this church was here today, they're way ahead of their time. I mean, in terms of like model of diversity and inclusion, right?

This is the group. They'd probably be on that poster. And so far in the study of Paul's letter in the first three chapters, again, if you missed a few, Paul has introduced himself.

He's established himself as an apostle and as a worthy advisor. He's offered his personal feelings toward the gospel. He's explained God's wrath. Not that we've settled on what that means yet, but he's explained God's wrath against sin and unrighteousness.

[4:20] He's affirmed the universal hopelessness of mankind, which I do think we all agree on. And he's connected sin with God's judgment. And so it's quite a bit, right?

Already covering quite a bit in Romans. He's now turned his focus at the end of chapter three and going into four on salvation and what means that comes through.

So preceding our text today, which we're about to read, is Romans 3, 23 to 25, which says, There is no distinction. 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, who God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

So the premise and the teaser has been set. And each segment is really chock full of truth just like that. So we're going to see no difference today. But here's the game plan. I'm going to read the text. I'm going to look at the substance of God's word, hopefully. See what he's got there declaring to these people. And then finally, I'll share a challenge at the end, semi-related to the exact text, but also taken from kind of Paul's example in entirety.

[5:31] Just something I've been chewing on that I think might inspire some challenge or some change and some thoughts for the group. Make sense? Cool. All right.

So feel free to turn to Romans if you're not there. We're going to pick it up in verse 27 and just read all the way through to chapter 4, verse 8. It starts with a question. It says, Chapter 4.

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say?

This is from Genesis 15. Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace with debt. But to him who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly.

His faith is accounted for righteousness. Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works. Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered.

[7:07] Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin. God, I pray that you would bless this morning. Give us your truth. Give us your challenges. Give us your encouragements.

Help us to be heroes of your word and also doers. We thank you for this opportunity this morning. I pray that you would speak through me and bless this group today. Amen. All right.

So even if you weren't paying attention or halfway checking your phone or whatever the kids do these days, you might have noticed a theme coming through, right? In just reading it. It's pretty hard to miss Paul's emphasis in this section that mankind is justified by faith before God apart from works of the law.

And there's no place for boasting because of that. And yet the simple truth has really been perverted by the world and our enemy since it was given, to be honest with you. If you go back and look at the early church and looking at the places like Acts 15, it says, And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, except you be circumcised after the man of Moses, you cannot be saved.

It says it again. Paul writes to Galatians, right? If any other man preaches any other gospel. So we see this theme coming up elsewhere. This simple purity of the message is always being challenged.

[8:24] And there's no short supply of false gospels when it comes to, you know, combating the truth. And it really makes sense if you think of it in that light. You think about Paul's early years. You think about what his life was like.

It makes sense that early on in his letter, as he's building a case, he wants to get to this and declare it, right? This is, I think this is, this is Paul's thing. You know, if you say everybody has a thing,

Paul's got a lot of things, but I think, I think this is his thing.

And so it's, it makes a lot of sense that he gets there quickly. That all who become saved are declared righteous the same way, if you're believing. And therefore, no one has a boast before God, as the song said.

Good choice, whoever picked that out. One of you guys. And the question is why? Why is that, right? As it shared earlier in Romans 3, because we are all equally lost and totally helpless. I think we would agree with that this morning. Others throughout history have commented on this same concept as being just, you know, the doctrine. Martin Luther said, Paul's teaching on justification by faith alone is the article by which the church either falls or stands.

[9:32] That's a pretty heavy quote. Pretty significant. Second, John MacArthur said justification by faith is, and always has been, the number one target of the enemy's attack. So this component that's being introduced by Paul, it's not a, it's not a brush off.

It might seem as reminder to us, but it is, it is of key importance. But did you notice how Paul communicates this? We're going to get more into this later. But he's declaring a challenging truth specifically to his Jewish hearers and consider his tact.

This is something that potentially could have alienated some folks, right? Bringing in this, this topic. And so he just starts by asking the question. Where then is boasting? It is excluded.

And this is the third time already Paul has referenced the concept of boasting. Some before God. Some as a sin. Romans 1.30. Romans 2.17. It comes up several chapters later, as we'll see.

And so it almost begs the question, why? Why does Paul go this direction as he's pivoting to such an important thing? Well, he's going to talk about it. But I thought I'd take a quick aside and think about, you know, boasting before God and also boasting in the sense of, you know, was there anything, was there any reason why it keeps coming up?

[10:50] Is there any sort of theme within the brethren there? I mentioned this group is world-renowned. It is the capital city, the empire city of Rome. We know that the Jews historically have a little tendency towards pride and tradition and the privilege that they enjoyed as a people.

And let's be honest, most of mankind has a little bit of a challenge with pride. I mean, I do. I don't know if I'm alone in that. How about the Gentile Romans? Do they have anything that's indicative of their society, right?

This is steaming of knowledge. This is steaming of wisdom. This, you know, we are the Roman Empire. Perhaps, this is just a little bit of speculation, but perhaps this group, maybe in Paul's writing, as he had heard of some things, as he's thinking about how is this going to come across to this audience?

Perhaps he thought in the sense of, you know, there's propensity for needling, maybe a little bit of piety within the group. It doesn't say that specifically. But if you peek ahead later in Romans, Romans chapter 11, it comes up again a little bit later.

He does mention this again. He says, this time to the Gentiles, Romans 11, verse 13 and then 16. He says, So I don't know.

[12:22] Maybe there was. Maybe there was a little bit of a back and forth here. But I love his approach and the way he's addressing it, right? Realizing the Roman culture may have seen some pride in who they were, specifically on the Gentile side.

Realizing that the Jewish Romans had all this history and this feeling of being, you know, God's people. And yet he says there's no distinction.

Now, that's curious, right? I don't mean to make a mountain out of a molehill here. I'm not saying it's there. But I found something in that just as a helpful reminder. And if you look around the room today, which I can do, you guys can't really as easily.

But look around the room today. You know, what do you see? I don't see any Jewish cohort here. You know, there's no big pocket of traditional Jews. I don't see any scholars or elites.

You know, anybody that would deem themselves a little more worthy. I don't see much of anything. And that's not to be condescending. I just, it's, yeah, I apologize.

[13:26] Again, I have issues with pride. Yeah. But still, what can that do for us? What's the question at the end of Romans 3? You know, it's the reminder that should I be tempted as a lifelong believer, particularly,

to think that I'm better than someone newly saved?

Would those with a heritage or a pedigree or coming from a certain circumstance think that they're more worthy? You know, in case there's a day where I wake up and I think that I'm any more deserving than the next man.

And we know what Paul declares about that in this topic here. Never should our gifts or our blessings or what we have in this life obstruct the purity of the gospel and the level playing field of which we're saved from.

So hopefully that makes sense. And recognizing that it is the same God who saves through faith, universally, both genders.

Notice I said both. All nations of people, you know, uniquely hopeless to die, hopelessly destined to die. But through belief, you know, as is those who are called, we have a free gift from God.

[14:36] And Paul says to the Jews, I think this is where he starts to pivot and really address the Jews a little bit more in this assembly. But he says salvation doesn't contradict the law.

It fulfills it. It establishes it, as he says there. The reason it was given to point to this need. It wasn't thrown out. It wasn't completely discarded. And that's important, right? It was given to support this gospel.

You know, what's curious is I often have to think to myself, I read this as a 21st century Gentile, right? Texts like this and others, you read this and we forget how potentially offensive this sort of thinking could be to those who would maybe come from a different spot, specifically in the Jewish background.

It could have been divisive. It could have sparked some rebellion. But consider the alternative to that as Paul is writing and establishing this point. The impact that this truth might have on the believers in Rome.

I don't know if you're picking up what I'm putting down here. But what new element has God provided here in describing salvation this way? It's an extreme unity, if you think about it.

[15:48] Perfect equality because of Christ. You're all in this the same way. What a wonderful thing, right? Not only is our salvation offered us completely as a finished work, so you don't have to do anything for it, but our lack of contribution to that is a feature that binds us.

And it creates a harmony from what otherwise would be a war of prides or positions or competing, right? And isn't that ironic in the day and age that we live?

If you think about it, turn on the news, look at corporate culture in America, look at the government agendas, consider what everybody's obsessed with. It's creating this forced and artificial definition of equality.

It's, you know, it's a disingenuous architecting of race, gender, class, status leveling. Everybody wants it in their company, in their schools, in your name it.

And the only real solution for that is Christ. I thought that was neat. Just, you know, kind of drawing out some application from this text. And as Paul reminds the Ephesians in chapter 4, it says, Just as you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

[17:06] Can you imagine what the churches would be like throughout history and today if it wasn't that way? If boasting had a place, both before God and amongst each other in that way.

What a madhouse. Imagine our society with, you know, Instagram heroes and virtue signaling. Yeah, what a disaster. And it points me really back to the cross and the idea that as Jesus is there in 19, John 19, 30, and it is finished.

And just the law is satisfied and complete and being brought together. It's a really neat picture. And even as Paul writes this message that may have been a little abrasive to some, to this diverse group of believers, how neat is it that that is unifying in a way?

So sharing that just to encourage you guys. Getting along to chapter 4 here, making our way through the text. I still find it amazing that Paul had never really visited or met because they don't have Zoom back in the day, right?

If you're not there, you're not seeing people. This is a group that he hasn't really had an encounter with. And yet he speaks with such authority and boldness in this letter. Did you notice that?

[18:21] The substance of the first three chapters is heavy. This isn't light stuff. The words aren't sugar-coated. But Paul, being a Jew of Jews and studying his whole life under the traditions of the law and other teachings there, he knew how this might be received.

And because God equipped him with that background and those skills, right, what does he do? He's got this point that he just built out to the Jews. And what does he do? And don't just take it from me. Anybody do reading Rainbow?

Don't take my word for it. Yeah. I forgot that dude's name, but he's still around. Anyway, he says, don't take my word for it. And he brings to the call two guys.

Father Abraham and King David. And this is actually, it kind of fits ironically with the March Madness theme. You know, I don't know who originally coined the phrase, go big or go home. But it could have been Saul of Tarsus.

I mean, there's really no one bigger in Jewish history than David and Abraham. At least you could make a case for that. So he points to those guys.

[19:25] He starts out in chapter four by looking at Abraham. It's the one to whom God established his covenant. Before the law was ever given, before God changed Jacob's name to Israel. Even then, salvation for Abraham was through faith.

It says in verse two and three of chapter four, for if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say?

Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. That word counted here comes up several times by Paul, indicating a banking transaction. It means something owned or possessed by person number one has been moved over here to person number two's account. It's kind of like Venmo. I know you guys use Venmo. I love all the creative labels you guys give. And I see people in my friend group, you know, what the payment was for. And the creativity is great. I've got friends that take full advantage of that to embarrass me. But it's kind of like the spiritual version of Venmo, right? Imagine opening up your account one day and just seeing God paid you infinity.

[20:32] Not a bad day. No shade after that. But Paul says even the OG Jew, right? Abraham, he believed and was credited. Hey, Jewish Christian, if this doesn't sit well with you, you still think the salvation comes from the law, you want to work for it?

Take it up with Father Abraham. Then he continues. Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but his due. Let's not forget that Rome was the most advanced economy the world had really ever seen.

Every person hearing these words or reading these words from Paul, they knew what paid wages were. They operated in an environment of earnings and compensation. It was 100% part of their society.

So then Paul continues. To the one who does not work, but who believes in him who justifies the ungodly. We'll get back to that in a second. His faith is counted as righteousness, he says in verse 5.

Here again, could be two reactions to words like this. To the Gentile Christian, and to me personally, I read that. It's full of hope. It's full of blessing. Because I was never part of, historically, God's chosen people in that regard.

[21:42] It was grafted in, or Gentiles were grafted in, as it says later on. But to a Jewish person in the background, hearing that God justifies the ungodly. And then naming Abraham in the same sentence.

You want to talk about getting triggered? This for 2021, that might be labeled hate speech, in a way. You know, we'd be looking at the first microaggression from Paul. You ask, you know, why? Why would that be? Well, the scripture says, look at Exodus. I will not justify the wicked. The law said justify the righteous and condemn the wicked in Deuteronomy. You can see where it comes together there.

And how abrasive that might be. We'll come right back to that. Paul moves on right to witness number two. King David. The line of Christ. The premier leader of Jewish history. The wealthiest family.

I mean, that counts for something today. I don't know if it counted for something back then. But these are the guys, right? The Kennedys. The Kardashian Wests, unfortunately. He quotes David saying, To the one who God counts righteousness apart from works.

[22:46] Blessed are those whose law the steeds are forgiven. Essentially, what Paul is asking is this. It might seem obvious to you, but I've got to say it anyway. If there was boasting to be had. If.

Could anyone in the church at Rome compete with the accomplishments or the pedigree of Abraham or David? Was there anyone more worthy? Was there anyone closer to God? Paul says, not even these men had a boast. That even they were saved by their faith. In their belief, they were declared righteous. In their faith.

So let me pivot here. Coming up on the end. Because maybe when you woke up today, maybe everything that I've shared so far has been a reminder.

Maybe you're sitting here thinking, great, you know, but I'm not Jewish. I don't have this background that makes me struggle with this. You know, only when it comes to my wallet. But what does this lesson from Paul do to me?

[23:48] Maybe you're a believer here who has no issue with faith alone and Christ alone. And you've been saved long enough to know that I'd be a fool to boast. So now what? Now that we've read this.

What are we to do? Let me end here with a challenge. Something that just thematically God has sort of raised up to me and said, you know, this might be worthy of considering.

But it's taken really from the whole of Paul's example. From his approach to his ministries, to his teachings. And the question is this. Given all that. Are we willing?

Are we ready to emulate Paul? How willing are we to accept the reality of these truths? Let me say it another way. Do we understand how offensive our doctrines could be to our hearers?

Do we recognize how contrary our gospel is outside these walls? Do I understand and admit how abrasive the truth can be?

[24:55] Are you and I prepared for that? Do we accept and operate under that reality? Now, I want to pause and just say that I realize this letter is written to believers. I realize most of Paul's letters are written to believers. And that's, I'm not disputing that.

I'm just simply pointing out that oftentimes, in fact, many times, what Paul has to say is confrontational. What Paul has to say are words that people wrestle with.

That tend to go against part of the grain. And I'm not saying he's an error in doing that. I'm just recognizing that theme and giving you the challenge that I've sort of taken from this study so far as well.

Having never met these folks, right? Having only been equipped with the spirit of God as an apostle and the knowledge of the world, the challenge is this. Paul's not afraid to own a confrontational message.

He holds fast to the truth of the gospel first and foremost. Knowing that the hearer might be taken back on occasion. And he lives his life, his ministry, his tones, his letters under that reality.

[25:59] And so the question, right, is could that be said of me? Could that be said of you? Again, I know that Paul is, you know, not combating the world necessarily, but often writing to the church.

But I think in our day and age, we have a similar encounter, if you get what I'm saying. And you read Acts 9, right? You see it plainly. You look at Paul's life. I mean, he's saved on the way to Damascus.

He spends years there until they decide what? It's time to kill him. So he sneaks out the back, right? They lower him down in a basket, goes back to Jerusalem until what? It's time to kill him. He goes back up to Tarsus. I mean, the theme continues, right?

He doesn't have many friends in many places who just automatically agree with what he has to say. And whether it was amongst believers of the lost, I think Paul understood this, right?

I think he got the concept. He was aware of the gospel's polarizing effect. And he was ready to own the abrasion of the truth. So why is that a challenge for us?

[26:55] Why even go there? Why even talk about this today here at Romans 3 and 4? It's just something, like I said, I've been passionate about

lately. And just thinking about the challenge and the example from Paul, if you get this.

I think in America, especially up until recently, we've had this watered-down view of that. And all I mean is, you know, our culture is unique in history in that you roll back the clock 50 years, our society had different values.

Not everyone in America was saved. I would never go that far. But what I'm talking about is you could pray and discipline in schools. You could acknowledge God in a public setting and, you know, the God of creation.

And it was accepted. There were only two genders. And that was agreed upon. I dare say, like, all of that is being thrown out the window. We are living in a time where, whether you agree with it or not, our society is going the direction of Romans 1 and 2.

And so the masked feeling of, yeah, everybody kind of agrees with me, is gone, in my opinion. And the challenge I want to leave you with is just to make no mistake about that.

[28:07] Our message is royally offensive to our hearers. Our gospel flies in contradiction to the doctrines of this world. And are you ready for that? Do you understand that to be the case?

2 Thessalonians 2.10 says, And with all deceivableness and unrighteousness in them that perish, because they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

And for this cause, God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie. If you don't see that outside these walls, you're not looking.

Paul knew it. And he was prepared accordingly. And I'm telling you, it is a world of opposites. We esteem God, the almighty creator, infallible, flawless, right?

The world says not. It's mankind. We got it. We science. We figure it out. We learn. We control. God's truth says all people are sinners. Romans 3.23.

[29:06] We're fallen. We're broken. That's why you hurt. The world says no. Love yourself. You're perfect just the way you are. That's a lie. God's word says truth.

Sorry. God's word says trust in Christ. There is one God in one way. The world says what? Trust in politicians. Trust in health care. What's right for you is right. Just be kind.

Coexist. Be true to yourself. Not for one second should we operate under the delusion that the religion of man and the gospel of Jesus Christ is cooperative. I mean, as believers, right?

We say there's one source of real hope. The world says that's too close-minded. Here. Grab one of these social causes that we've constructed. I'll explain away the guilt that way. I'll give you a source of meaning and purpose right here in this silo until we decide to turn it into this silo.

Right? Let's just keep feeding the pride of man. God's truth says all men are mortal and will die. The world says unending health care, preservation of life. Don't worry about that thing called death.

[30:10] The gospel says fear the one who can destroy the soul. The world says no. Fear cancel culture. Fear financial loss. God says before you were born, I knew you in your mother's womb.

The world says that's not even life. The world says that's not even a gender. We'll own that later. I got pages of these. I'm not going to read them all. But I mean, it's everything.

Every single topic you can think of. If you woke up today unaware of just how offensive and competing the gospel that we believe is, don't go to sleep without embracing that reality.

Because what we believe as Christians, what Paul declares in Romans, the doctrines that we hold tightly to as believers in the church, flies in rebellion to everything that's outside these walls.

Be prepared. Be ready. Boldly proclaiming that truth. Knowing that it's going to be abrasive. Paul reminds the Corinthian church, chapter 1, verse 23.

[31:13] He says, we preach Christ crucified unto the Jews of stumbling block and foolishness to the Greeks. And I think we can wrap up there. But just if you've never appreciated that example from Paul, I was challenged by it today.

You know, to be tactful. To be alert. To just remember. You know, if I miss that. If I sell myself a lie. If I, for some reason, forget that what we believe and what God has established as truth is contrary to the enemy and contrary to the world, I'm handicapping myself.

You know, you're doing yourself a disservice. You may even find yourself discouraged. And this is kind of what was driving the challenge for me. You might get discouraged. You might find yourself confused by the world's response or by the things that you're seeing outside.

You might even become caught up in the themes and religions of our time. 2 Corinthians 11, 3.

Paul writes, he says, But I fear lest by any means as the serpent beguiled thee through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

What is Paul saying there? Saying there's a lot that's going to knock you off. There's a lot outside of this. But don't let your minds be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

[32:29] I think he's referring exactly to our gospel. So I hope that's a challenge for you. I apologize for going a little bit long here. But not to ignore Ephesians 4, right?

Speaking the truth in love, this is not a license to go out and offend. That's not the direction I'm headed here. It's just a challenge to prepare, to be armed and to be ready, to emulate Paul in owning the truth, owning the realities of the gospel and what God has declared through us, and knowing that God's word confronts the errors of those who would pervert the truth.

If the musicians want to come up here, now I realize this is something that's easier to just pretend is not the case. It's much easier to go back home and think, yeah, most of my neighbors probably agree with me.

They probably all believe in God. They probably all, when it comes down to it. And you know what? It's so much simpler to just live that way. But be encouraged.

I'll close with three verses here and then we can sing. 1 Peter 2, 7 to 8 says, So the honor is for you who believe. But for those who don't believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

[33:39] They stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do. 1 Corinthians 1, 18, For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

Luke 7, 23, Jesus said, Blessed is he who is not offended because of me. I think that's a challenge to myself and hopefully encouraging to you as well. So let's sing and worship the God who saves completely and entirely.

Not a part of works. So that no man can boast. He's a great one. The ■ And the power of God.