

Found Righteous (Part 6)
Romans 3:21-31
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Friday, we celebrate the death of our Lord. There's no better passage for us to study together this morning than the one in God's providence that we come to in our study of Paul's letter to the Romans because the verses we come to today explain the cross. Here we learn God's perspective on the cross. We learn that the primary purpose behind the cross is what theologians call penal substitution. Now that's an expression that hopefully's familiar to you, but if it's not, let me explain it. Penal substitution. The word "penal" simply means having to do with punishment for breaking the law. We speak of the Texas penal code. That's the code where the penalties for various crimes are spelled out.

Substitution you understand - that's when one person acts or stands or serves in the place of another. So, when we speak of Jesus' death as penal substitution, we mean that He was standing in our place, that's substitution, to pay our penalty for our breaking God's law. That's penal substitution. That is the message, by the way, of both the Old Testament as well as the New Testament.

In fact, if you go back to the center of the gospel in the Old Testament, Isaiah 53, listen to verse 10. It says, "The Lord was pleased to crush the Messiah." Why? Because He rendered Himself as a guilt offering. We talked last week what it would be like if you were to offer a sin or a guilt offering, how you would put your hands on the head of the animal, and then you would take the knife and slit its throat. It's as if the same thing happened with Christ. It's as if we placed our hands on His head, transferring our guilt to Him, and then it's as if we took His life. Although, in reality it was His laying down of His own life and of course the Father crushing Him as Isaiah says. That's penal substitution. It's this reality that Paul is explaining in Romans 3:25 and 26. Now let me read for you again the entire paragraph so that we get a running start in our text for this morning. Romans 3:21,

But now apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His

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grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

This paragraph is the very central point of Paul's letter to the Romans. There is no more important paragraph in the letter than this one. It is Paul's explanation of the gospel he preached, and at the center of the gospel he preached was justification. So here in these verses Paul outlines for us five foundational truths about our justification.

First of all, we noted and let me just remind you of them that justification has always been the divine plan.

Secondly, we notice that justification is appropriated by faith alone, in Christ alone.

Thirdly, we've learned that justification is imperative for all people. There is no distinction. All have sinned in the same way, therefore all are made right with God in the same way.

Fourthly, we've learned that justification flows from the grace of God alone being justified verse 24 says as a gift by His grace.

And last time we were considering a fifth truth about our justification and that is that justification is accomplished by the work of Christ alone. From the middle of verse 24 down through verse 26, Paul captures for us the work of Christ that made our justification possible. And he captures the work of Christ in two absolutely critical words. In verse 24 the word "redemption" and in verse 25 the word "propitiation". Redemption we noted is simply an overview of what Christ accomplished at the cross. Notice verse 24, "being justified as a gift by His grace through...." We are justified through or by means of the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. The picture behind this word is that you and I had sold ourselves into the slavery of sin and Christ's death was a ransom payment that He made to the Father that takes the place of the payment we owed to the Father because of our sinful choices. It's a general word, an overview of His work at the cross.

The second word that Paul uses in verse 25 is the word "propitiation." This word is the very heart of what Christ accomplished on the cross. Notice verse 25: "whom God displayed publicly

as a propitiation.” At the heart of the crucifixion, at the very center of the atonement of Jesus Christ, at the heart of the gospel is the work that Paul here calls propitiation. It’s not a word we use very often. We sang it in the song that we sang together this morning, but it’s not a word we use in everyday language, but it is an absolutely crucial word this word “propitiation.” It simply means this: the satisfaction or the turning away of God’s wrath, the satisfaction or the turning away of God’s wrath. Paul’s already made it very clear in this letter that we all have a problem with the wrath of God. Go back to Romans 1:18: “For the wrath of God is [being] revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteous.” God is angry and is expressing that anger against sin today but that is nothing compared to what He will ultimately express.

Romans 2 talks about the coming judgment. Verse 4: “Do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience?” In other words, do you take God’s goodness to you in this life for granted thinking that that means He’s OK with you? Not knowing, verse 4, that the kindness of God He intends to lead you back to Himself to lead you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart, Paul says, you are storing up God’s wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Paul says the wrath that’s being displayed today, the wrath of divine abandonment in Romans 1 is nothing compared to the wrath that’s being stored up that will one day unleash in its fury on every sinner who refuses to embrace His Son.

Over in 3, verse 20, verse 19 rather, Paul says ultimately when everyone of us who is outside of Christ stands before God in judgment, verse 19 says, “Every mouth will be ... [silenced].” There won’t be any defense, and we will be guilty before God; we will be accountable to God. So, we have nothing to anticipate in and of ourselves but God’s wrath. Now look at 3:25: God publicly displayed His Son as the propitiation, as the complete satisfaction of His wrath. So, this word “propitiation” then identifies God’s great reason for the crucifixion. God, think of this, God crushed His Son on the cross. The main thing that happened at the crucifixion wasn’t what the Romans did to Jesus, what the Jews did to Jesus, it’s what God did to Jesus. God crushed His Son on the cross in order to completely satisfy His own wrath against every sinner who would ever believe in His Son. Now, that’s propitiation.

In these 2 verses, Paul provides us with several key insights into this reality of propitiation or the satisfaction of God’s just and holy wrath against sin. Let’s look at those insights together. We already touched on a couple of them last week.

The first insight that Paul lays out about propitiation is that: it was initiated by God. Verse 25, “Whom God (in context it has to be the Father), whom the Father publicly displayed.” You see the entire plan of redemption including putting Christ out as the satisfaction of His own wrath came from the heart of the Father motivated - are you ready for this? - by His love for you. First John 4:10: “In this is love, that the Father loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” God’s love moved Him to pour out His anger on Christ for our sins.

A second insight into propitiation that we saw last week is that: it is defined by substitution. If we reorder the first clause of verse 25 into a real sentence, a complete sentence, it would read like this: “The Father publicly displayed Christ Jesus as a propitiation.” The Father made Christ the focus of the public display of His wrath. This is what John teaches in 1 John 2:2 when he says of Christ: “He himself is the propitiation.” Christ is the propitiation for our sins. To use the image that we saw last week in the Old Testament, each one of us deserve to drink the cup of God’s wrath. By our own sin we had accumulated God’s wrath, and God had every right to force us to drink it to its dregs but instead Christ took the cup from everyone who would ever believe in Him, and on the cross He drank the cup to its dregs so there isn’t one drop left for us. He substituted in enduring the wrath our sins deserved. It’s defined by substitution.

A third insight into propitiation that I want us to look at today is that: it was realized by Christ’s death. It was realized by Christ’s death. Verse 25: “whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood.” Notice that prepositional phrase “in His blood.” That tells us how propitiation was accomplished, how it was achieved, how it was realized - “in His blood.” Now let me, first of all, make sure that you understand that there was nothing magical about the physical blood that flowed through the veins of Jesus. He was really man. He was truly and really God, but at the same time He was genuinely human. There was no difference in the blood that flowed through His veins than flows through mine or yours. It wasn’t that there was some magical properties of the blood of Christ. But we can’t dismiss the biblical references to blood as if that’s unimportant. I mean after all you have passages like Hebrews 9:22 that says, “without [the] shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” That makes blood pretty important in the scope of redemption, so what does it mean? What does the phrase “propitiation in His blood” mean?

Well, the references in Scripture to the blood of Christ point to His being the perfect fulfillment of all the Old Testament animal sacrifices. In the Old Testament, for that animal to die in your place as a symbol of an innocent person or an innocent being dying in your place, it had to shed its blood. You slit its throat. The priest would then collect that blood and throw it against the altar. The blood pouring out of that animal symbolized its death, its violent death in the place of

the one who deserved to die. In the same way when you read of Christ's blood in the New Testament it refers to Christ as a sacrifice. It refers to His violent death. That's really what "in His blood" means: His violent death. He's giving His life in exchange for ours. You see, we deserve to die.

Have you thought about this? You, I, we deserve to die. Ezekiel 18:4: "The soul ... [that] sins will die." Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin" - what we earn by our sin from God is death - obviously physical death. Ever thought about that? I've thought about that a lot more recently. Every single one of us in this room will die someday if Jesus doesn't return. Why? Because of sin. If you doubt God's seriousness about sin, if you doubt His holiness, just remind yourself the reason there is death in the world, the reason you will die is because God hates sin so much. But it's not just physical death.

John the apostle in the Book of Revelation refers to the second death, an eternal dying that he calls the lake of fire, a place of permanent suffering both physical and mental suffering apart from the presence of God. We deserve that. Christ on the other hand did not deserve to die. This is the testimony of everyone who knew Him. He said of Himself, "Who can identify any sin in me?" Even His enemies couldn't. Pilot declared Jesus' innocence at least four times in His Roman trial before he gave Him over to be crucified. The repentant thief hanging on the cross next to Jesus said, "This man has done nothing worthy of death." Those are human testimonies.

What about the Father's testimony? He spoke from heaven and said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Since Jesus was innocent of all sin, since He was the only human being ever to live who did not deserve to die, He was the only one qualified to die in our place. Think about that. Every other human being needed to die for his own sin. He couldn't die for mine. But Jesus because He had no sin was the only one qualified to die for sinners. First Peter 3:18 puts it this way: "Christ [also] died for sins once for all [here it is] the just for the unjust." He had to be just, He had to be undeserving of death in order to die for those that deserved death so that He might bring us to God. That's why He died. At the cross Jesus accomplished propitiation - the once and forever satisfaction of God's wrath and He did so by dying the violent death of a sacrifice in the believing sinner's place.

This is the picture not only of the Old Testament but of the New. Turn to Ephesians 5. Ephesians 5:2. Paul here urges us to walk in love as Christ loved. Notice what he says about Christ in Ephesians 5:2, "Christ loved you." That would be enough, wouldn't it? Just stop there and think about that. Christ loved you. And how did He demonstrate that love? He gave Himself up for us.

In what sense? Notice how He explains it in Old Testament sacrificial terms. He gave Himself as an offering and a sacrifice to God. That's what He did. The innocent dying in the place of the guilty. Our guilt transferred to Him, and God treating Him as if He had committed our sin. But don't miss the end of verse 2: "A sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma."

Now what really fascinates me about that expression is that is exactly the same expression the Septuagint uses, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, for that phrase we saw last week in the Old Testament related to all the sacrifices. They arose, you remember the smoke arose, as a soothing aroma to God. It quieted, it calmed, it satisfied His wrath. That's what Paul's saying the death of Christ did. He was the perfect sacrifice. As He died, God saw it and it quieted, it soothed, it completely satisfied in a way an animal's death never could, His just anger against our sin.

Propitiation was in His blood. It was initiated by God.

Propitiation secondly is defined by substitution.

Thirdly it's realized by Christ's death.

There's a fourth insight here in this passage and that is that: it is appropriated by faith alone. Propitiation like justification is appropriated by faith alone. Notice verse 25. God publicly displayed Christ as a propitiation in His blood through faith. Paul's point is not that this is one way that a sinner can personally benefit from Christ's propitiation. It's the only way. It's in His blood through faith. Now Paul has already made this point clearly a number of times in Romans already back in chapter 1, in chapter 3, so I'm not going to belabor it here. I just want you to let this sink into your soul. The benefits of Christ's propitiation, of His sacrifice do not automatically apply to anyone, and you're not the exception. His death and its benefits did not, and does not, automatically apply to you. The only way what He did becomes yours: it's appropriated through faith. It's in His blood, but it's through faith. Each person must exercise saving faith.

Let me just ask you this morning. Have you ever exercised saving faith in Jesus Christ? I'm not asking if you're religious. I'm not asking if you were raised in a good home. I'm not asking if you basically agree with what Christianity teaches. I'm not asking if you believe that Jesus is who He claimed He was. I'm asking, have you personally ever put your faith in Jesus Christ, in

His work for you? Because that's the only way you will ever experience the benefits of what He did. And by the way, faith is not a human work. I love the way J.C Ryle puts it. He says,

True faith has nothing whatever of merit about it and in the highest sense cannot be called a work. Faith is but laying hold of a savior's hand, receiving a physician's medicine. It brings with it nothing to Christ but a sinful man's soul. It gives nothing, contributes nothing, pays nothing, performs nothing. It only receives, takes accepts, grasps and embraces the glorious gift of justification which Christ bestows.

See faith is not what saves us. It's only the hand we reach out to grasp what really makes us acceptable to God which is the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is in His blood through faith. We appropriate the satisfaction that He rendered to God's wrath by faith and faith alone. Now that brings us to Paul's final and his most important insight into propitiation.

Number five: it is required by God's character. This is the main point Paul wants to make. This is why God had to publicly display Christ as a propitiation. By the way, that expression "publicly display," Plato uses that to describe the laying out of the dead body of Socrates. The point is God did something at the cross that was intentionally very public. He wanted people to look. He wanted them to view. He wanted them to see. In one sense of course, God put Christ on display His entire earthly life and ministry. But here the reference is to the crucifixion. On the cross God placed Christ on center stage in human history so that everyone could see what was happening. God wanted to make sure nobody missed. In fact, if I could put it respectfully, the Father made a public spectacle out of His Son on the cross, and the rest of the paragraph explains why. God planned the public display of His wrath on Christ in order to prove two realities about His character.

First of all, God wanted to vindicate His justice in sparing and blessing sinners. God wanted to vindicate His justice in sparing and blessing sinners. Look at verse 25. He publicly set Him forth to demonstrate His righteousness. The Greek word translated "to demonstrate" means "to prove, to provide evidence." At the cross God wanted to prove His righteousness. Now when the word "righteousness" refers to God in the early chapters of Romans, it's used in one of two senses. Either it speaks of the righteousness that comes from God as a gift to sinners (that's back up in 3:1), or it's speaking of the righteous character of God and that's the sense here and in this context that of a judge rendering a verdict, it can be translated with the English word "justice." So, we could translate it like this, "At the cross God wanted to prove or to exonerate or to

vindicate His justice.” Now why in the world would God need to vindicate His justice? Well, the next phrase explains. Because in the forbearance of God, He passed over the sins previously committed.

Now that is one of the most difficult phrases in the book of Romans to interpret. Before we look at what it means, let me tell you what it doesn’t mean. It doesn’t mean that God refused to punish the sins of those or failed to punish the sins of those committed before Christ. He punished their sins. He punished them temporally with temporal judgments at times. He certainly is punishing them eternally if they refuse to turn to Him and His Son. Secondly, it does not mean that God never really forgave Old Testament believers. Again, and again, the Old Testament talks about the forgiveness of God even in those times. So, it doesn’t mean that. So, what does Paul mean?

Well let’s start with the word that’s going to help us most understand what he’s trying to say here. Look at the word “forbearance.” That same Greek word occurs back in 2:4 where it’s translated as “tolerance” by the NAS. It means “to declare a temporary truce.” In describing this word, John MacArthur writes, “Rather than destroying every person the moment he sins, God graciously holds back His judgment.” So, because of God’s forbearance, His tolerance, His temporary truce, notice it says He passed over sins. The expression “pass over,” that word doesn’t refer to forgiveness; it refers to letting sins go unpunished. It’s not forgiveness; it’s not punishing at this time.

Now, all of us in this room understand this word very personally. When you were young you remember you would do something that was clearly disobedient, clearly rebellious, and your parent would say something like this to you, “Listen, you should not have done that, I told you not to do that. You deserve a spanking, to be punished (whatever, however it was said in your household).” Let me tell you I heard that a lot when I was growing up. I was number ten and I think I just sort of reaped the fruit of the wrath that my nine siblings deserved so I heard this a lot. “You deserve a spanking.” And usually I really did. But what about those times when your parents said something like that to you and it was true but then they didn’t spank you, but they didn’t punish you. That was forbearance. That was passing over.

Now there’s a key difference between your parents withholding the punishment you deserve, and God’s withholding the punishment you deserve because often parents fail to deal with their children’s disobedience because of bad reasons like they’re too busy, too distracted, too tired. It’s just too hard. But with God it is always an expression of His common grace. He’s giving sinners time to repent. Now notice what God passed over in His forbearance, the sins previously

committed. That likely refers to the sins committed before Christ came, the sins committed under the old covenant. It's like what Paul says in Acts 17:30 when he says to the Athenians, "God ... [has] overlooked the times of [man's] ignorance, but ... [He's] now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent...." So likely, "the sins previously committed" refers to the sins committed before Christ came, before He died. It could refer, as Luther taught, to the sins that each of us committed before conversion. But frankly, it doesn't really matter because either way the point's the same. God had every right to destroy the sinner the moment that we sin. His justice demanded our immediate death.

Genesis 2:17. What did He say to Adam? "In the day that you eat ... you shall surely die." In Exodus 34:7 God says, "He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished...." So, in His forbearance God graciously passed over. He allowed guilty sinners to live. More than that, He gives them a constant stream of temporal blessings – good things in this life. Now don't miss Paul's point because truly it is shocking. What Paul is saying here is that even the common grace God shows in sparing and blessing sinners' lives, in sparing them from death and blessing them with all the good things they enjoy, even His common grace could taint His justice. Justice demanded His curse and wrath immediately. God said He hated sin, and He would punish it without fail, and then He waited. Man sinned; He waited. Adam, He told Adam, "In the day you eat, you shall surely die" and Adam lived for hundreds of years.

That story is repeated again and again throughout the Old Testament. It could easily appear that God was actually tolerant of sin, that He really didn't think it was that bad and that He didn't keep His Word, that He was not as holy and just as He had presented Himself to be. And so, at Calvary, God had to vindicate His character as just. Christ's death made it possible for God to show unbelieving sinners common grace without staining His justice.

This was not the primary purpose of the death of Christ, but it was an absolutely crucial one. Now just think about this practically for a moment. I want you to think about your own life. What Paul is saying here is that if God had not poured out His wrath on Christ on the cross, He would have stained His character by letting you live one moment longer than your first sin. He would have stained His character by doing anything good to you because His justice said you have to be punished. How lightly we take our sin.

Listen, if you're alive and not in hell at this moment, that right was purchased by Christ for you. If you are in good health and not wasting away in some ward of hopeless patients in a hospital, that was purchased for you by Christ. If you have food to eat, if you have family and friends, if

you enjoy the good things of this life, if you find the richness of music satisfying to your soul, if you eat and enjoy the food and the variety that we have, if you enjoy the conversation with fellow human beings, if you enjoy creativity and producing work and accomplishing things, every blessing you enjoy was bought for you at the cross. God could never have done it without what He did to Christ. God vindicated His justice in giving you and me and every other sinner the blessings of common grace by what He did to Jesus on the cross. And if He hadn't, it would have stained, it would have tarnished His justice.

There's a second reason God's character demanded that He display Christ as a propitiation not only to vindicate His justice in sparing and blessing sinners, but secondly to vindicate His justice in justifying sinners. Verse 26. "For the demonstration" - notice the words "*I say*" are in italics. That means they're added by the translator. They are not there in the original. That makes it sound like He's just repeating Himself. He's not repeating Himself. Verse 26 is a second point so let's take the words "I say" out. "For the demonstration of His righteousness at the present time" as opposed to the passing over of the sins committed recently "so that He would be just and the justifier." God displayed Christ as a propitiation to prove or to give evidence of His righteousness so that He could at the same time be a God of justice and a God who justifies ungodly sinners. You see, verse 26 is more than God's patience toward unbelievers.

Verse 26 is about the justification of believers. God had to satisfy His wrath so that He could justify us. You know, we think so lightly about what God has done in salvation. We think that God could just sort of waved His magic wand and said, "You're forgiven; you're righteous." No, He could never do that. That's contrary to His nature. Remember Exodus 34:7, I "will by no means leave the guilty unpunished." That's God's promise to Himself. It's who He is. It's His character. It's His name.

In Proverbs 17:15 He says the judge "who justifies the wicked ... [is] an abomination to ... Me." If God had justified you without what He did at the cross, He would have made Himself an abomination. God could not simply declare the ungodly to be righteousness without any legitimate legal basis to do so. That's contrary to His nature. It's a compromise of His perfect justice. The only way God could be at the same time just and justify ungodly people was by making Christ the propitiation for our sins. How does that work? Because He executed the fullness of His justice on His Son. It was completely satisfied. He executed the full justice our sins deserved on Christ in our place. On the cross Jesus satisfied the negative demands of God's justice against us just as in His life He had satisfied the positive requirements of God's law.

If you have repented of your sin and embraced Christ as Lord and Savior, listen carefully. On the cross God treated Jesus as if He'd lived your sinful life so that He could be just and forever treat you as if you had lived Jesus' perfect life. It was Christ's work on the cross that made it possible for God to legitimately declare you righteous. God publicly displayed Christ as the satisfaction of His wrath because it was the only way, it was the only way that He could maintain His justice and call you righteous. That's God's perspective on the death of Jesus Christ. That's what was happening on the cross on Good Friday 2,000 years ago. You understand this? Don't get this out of your mind.

As you contemplate the death of our Lord this week remember that there were two great attributes of God that were displayed at the cross. On the one hand, the cross is a powerful declaration of God's eternal love. "God demonstrated His love for us," Romans 5:8 says, "in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The cross is a powerful testimony to the eternal love of God but at the same time the cross is a powerful witness to the justice of God. It was the only way for Him to be just and the justifier. Paul again answers the question, "Whom does God declare righteous?" The end of verse 26, "the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." The gift of a right standing before God is only for the one who doesn't work but receives it from Christ by faith. If you're here this morning, and you're not a Christian, you're not a follower of Christ, you may have paid very close attention to what I've said so far. Thank you. But maybe you haven't. Please listen now. Listen for just a moment. This is the point Paul is making to you this morning.

If you're not a Christian, you need to understand that what Jesus accomplished on the cross is why you are still breathing this morning. It's the only reason God still lets you live. It's the only reason you have anything good in your life because God vindicated His justice in allowing Himself to do that to you at the cross. But there is a day coming when you will experience none of His goodness: no mercy, no grace, no pity, no compassion, nothing but anger. That's what the Scriptures teach. Second Thessalonians 1 Paul writes,

The Lord Jesus ... [will] be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire. [And here's what He'll do,] dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ... these, [that's you if you're not a Christian,] will pay the penalty of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power....

That's your story. That's your biography. That's how your story ends unless you will turn to Christ. If you want to benefit from the primary effect of Christ's death, the gift of forgiveness and justification, where God declares you to be right with Him, then you have to cry out to God. You have to ask God to apply the benefits of Jesus' death to you.

Say how do I do that? Well, Jesus Himself told a magnificent story to illustrate how this is done. In Luke 18 He tells the story of a tax collector, a sinner of the worst sort. He goes to the temple. It's at the time of prayer which would have been the time of the morning or evening sacrifice so at the very time he's there praying, an animal is dying as a substitute for sinners. And this is what it says, Luke 18:13, Jesus says the tax collector standing some distance away was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but he was beating his chest. You just, you sense the remorse this guy has over his sin against God. And he says, "... God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" What's remarkable about that prayer is the unusual Greek word translated "be merciful." It's the very same family of words translated "propitiation." You know what he's really saying? He's was saying, "God, be propitiated to me, the sinner. God, may that innocent sacrifice satisfy Your wrath for me."

That's the very same prayer you have to pray. You have to come to God in genuine remorse, understanding how you've rebelled against Him; how you've sinned against Him. And you have to cry out as Jesus has this tax collector crying out. God, let the death of the substitute satisfy Your justice and Your wrath against me. I commit myself to follow your Son. I love what Jesus said. He said, "That man went down to his house justified." In a moment's time, he was right with God because he acknowledged his sin, and he came to God the way God demands that we come. And He'll receive you if you'll come that way today.

What about for those of us in Christ? How do we respond to propitiation? Very quickly, let me give you three responses.

Number one: commit yourself to tell others about the gospel. Propitiation is obviously at the very center of the gospel Paul preached. He explains it in the middle of a paragraph where he explains his gospel. And what did he say in Romans 1:16? "... I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God [unto] salvation to everyone who believes..." We shouldn't be ashamed of it either. I shouldn't; you shouldn't. You need to commit. Let's commit together that this week we will share the truth, the good news with somebody. That is one of the responses that you and I should have to propitiation.

Secondly: we should commit ourselves to lives of constant praise and gratitude, praise and thanksgiving to God for what He's done in Christ. Turn to Romans 11. Romans 11. Paul has laid out in the first 11 chapters the glories of our justification, of propitiation, of sanctification, of election. And notice how he concludes all of that – with praise, 11:33,

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! [He can't help himself as he thinks about what God has done in Christ. He just breaks out in thanksgiving and praise.] For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? OR WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.

We owe our Lord the same praise and thanksgiving. Let me just ask you. Does that sound anything like you? It should if you really understand what God has done for you in Christ.

There's a third response that we should have to propitiation and that is that: we should remember that our lives are not our own but belong to Jesus Christ. Your life is not yours to live as you choose. Look at Romans 12:1. Here's the first application of the doctrine of justification in the book of Romans. "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God [by His election, by His adoption, by His justification, by His propitiation, by all the mercies He's shown you in Christ] to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice." [Christ presented Himself as a dying sacrifice; present yourself as a living one] "acceptable to God *which is* your [reasonable act of] ... spiritual ... worship." Is this how you think about yourself? That you don't belong to you anymore? You don't have any right to choose today or tomorrow or next week what you want to do, what will bring you the most joy, the most pleasure. If you're a Christian, you are not your own; you were bought with a price. You belong to Jesus Christ.

The question you ought to ask yourself is what can I do today, this week that would honor Christ? What can I do as a living sacrifice to Him? I love the song we sang this morning. It captures the truth of our justification and propitiation in such a profound and beautiful way. The last two verses go like this –

His robes for mine: God's justice is appeased.
Jesus is crushed, and thus the Father's pleased.

Christ drank God's wrath on sin, then cried "Tis done!"
Sin's wage is paid; propitiation won.

His robes for mine: such anguish none can know.
Christ, God's beloved, condemned as though His foe.
[I love this. This is justification; this is propitiation]
He, as though I, accursed and left alone;
I, as though He, embraced and welcomed home!

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for the profound truths of the gospel. Thank you for recording them for us under the inspiration of your Spirit through the hand of Paul.

Oh God, let these truths sink deep in our souls, and may we respond as You've urged us to respond. Father, help us to tell others. Help us to open our mouths and share the truth of the gospel, of propitiation, of what You've done in Christ with the people around us. Father, help us to live lives of praise and thanksgiving, doxology.

And Father, help us as well to remember every day that we have been bought with a price, that our lives are not our own. We are now to be living sacrifices to the one who gave Himself as a sacrifice for us. Lord, this is all so hard for us. It's so contrary to our selfishness, so contrary to our nature. Help us to live like this.

And Father, I pray for those here this morning who are not in Christ, and I know there are a number. Oh God, please help them see the reality of their condition before You. And help them see that their only hope is to come to You like the tax collector crying out, "God, be propitiated to me, the sinner. Let the death of the substitute satisfy Your wrath against me." And may this be the day when they become Yours.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.