

This is the way to heaven. This is the right religion. *"This righteousness,"* Paul says, God's righteousness, not ours, not our trying to behave and be good, *"this righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ,"* not faith in ourselves, not faith in our own good intentions or good deeds, *"this righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."* It becomes ours by believing. And all solely by God's grace. God's grace wins through faith in Jesus!

Tell story of downed airplane pilot. Include the following points:

- Extreme heat and dryness
- Miles of nothing but sand and desert
- Mirages of oases
- Desire for water
- Three travelers, each with a necktie
- Pilot's anger and frustration
- Seeing palm trees waving over the village
- Finally reaching walled village
- Smelling sweet fragrances coming from village
- Hearing wonderful sounds coming from village
- Man speaking through window in heavy, wooden door
- Only comment: "If you want to enter, you'll need a necktie!"

*"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—"* Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, *"and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (2:8, 9).* *"Where, then, is boasting?"* Paul asks in our text today. *"It is excluded. Because of what law? The law that requires works? No, because of the law that requires faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law."* Which is why he says elsewhere, *"Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord" (1 Cor 1:31).* God's grace wins through faith in Jesus!

And so, as you drive around this summer and see all the construction barrels and flashing lights and warning signs, remember this: The road to heaven stands wide open before you, and that road is Jesus. Travel that road, and you find forgiveness; you find redemption; and you find righteousness, the right way to be right with God. Rest assured that God will let you into heaven someday. Be sure, because you trust in Jesus, not in yourself. He is your everything: your beginning, your end, and everything in between. He is your way to God and your go-between with God. *"[He] is your righteousness, holiness, and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30).* He is your light, your life, and your salvation. With Jesus, God's grace wins every time! Amen.

**Romans 3:21-31** – *Grace Wins* – St. Paul's, Muskego, WI  
07/21/19 – Pastor David M. Kuehl – 376, 378, 460

It's July here in Wisconsin, and that means that we're in the second of our two seasons, namely, road construction. You know what they say, don't you? "Wisconsin has two seasons: winter and road construction." It seems that no matter where we go, there are orange barrels, flashing yellow lights, and signs that warn us to slow down and drive safely. There are ways to avoid the construction. We can take a side road here or a county road there. Sometimes, as I experiment with these alternate routes, I wonder if it's really worth it. Maybe I would have reached my destination faster if I had just driven through the construction zone. That might be true, but it doesn't stop me from looking for other ways (as my family well knows).

We live in a world where people are looking for other ways—not to get from here to there geographically but to get to God. There are so many religions today, so many ways people are trying to find God. And each religion, each way, is trying its best to answer the question: What is the way to be right with God? In other words, what am I supposed to do to make God happy with me, smile on me, and someday let me into heaven? The Bible calls this being right with God "righteousness," and many people are looking for ways to manufacture this righteousness in their lives.

How about you? Are you sure that you are right with God? Are you sure that, when you die, God will let you into heaven? Are you absolutely, positively, sure? What is the way to be right with God? What religion is right? Today, as we continue our *Grace Wins* series, we're going to answer that question under this theme:

### **God's Grace Wins through Faith in Jesus**

- 1. The wrong way to be right (with God)**
- 2. The right way to be right (with God)**

1. Where's the last place people tend to look when they want to learn about being right with God? Surprisingly, it's the Bible. It reminds me of what happens when I get something where "some assembly is required." I'll spend all kinds of time and exert all kinds of effort trying to put it together intuitively, on my own, without reading the instructions, and it doesn't work. Finally, Sue will suggest that perhaps I should try reading the instructions. So I do, and it's not so difficult after all.

The reason there are so many religions in the world is that people are trying to figure out how to get right with God intuitively, without reading the instructions. They'll read a book; they'll go online; they'll ask a friend. Where do we find the instructions on how to be right with God? We find them in his Word, the Bible. And the first step in this learning process is to understand this verse from our text: *"There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* Every one of us is sinful, and not a one of us is right with God, not naturally, the way we're conceived and born into the world. Step number one in understanding how to be right with God, then, is to recognize that we're sinful and that our sins separate us from God.

A couple of weeks ago I spent about an hour on the phone with a young military man who's stationed in Guam. His name is Jacob. He's become good friends with one of our members, and they were having a discussion about faith and the Bible. Our member texted me and asked if I would talk to his friend, so I called him back on the phone. When I asked Jacob some pointed questions, he said to me, "Pastor Kuehl, I'm really trying to be a good person. I love my family, and I'm devoted to my country. I'm trying to live the way God wants me to live. So I'm pretty sure that God will someday let me into heaven." "Are you absolutely, positively, sure?" I asked. His answer was no. Do you see the problem? He didn't know God's instructions. Jacob didn't understand that he's fallen far short of the glory of God.

Have you been to the Grand Canyon? It's beautiful, isn't it, especially at sunrise and sunset? At its widest point, it's eighteen miles across, and at its narrowest, it's 600 feet from rim to rim. Is it possible to jump over the Grand Canyon? No, it's not. Even the greatest of athletes, with the wind at his back, trying his hardest, wouldn't be able to jump across the Grand Canyon. He would fall far, far short.

God tells us that, no matter how nice we are, how hard we try, we still fall short of his glory, his praise. And the reason that's so is that God requires perfection. If we want to earn heaven, perfection is necessary. *"Be perfect,"* Jesus says, *"as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48)."* That's a big canyon to jump across! How can anyone be perfect? Every one of us has moments of weakness, occasions when we are selfish or impatient, times when we complain about or fail to trust God's will. Even having a greedy, a lustful, or an unkind thought is sin in the eyes of God. We try hard, we really do, don't we, but how can anyone be perfect? Short answer? We can't. *"There is no difference,"* Paul says, *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

If you have chosen this road to be right with God and get to heaven, you've chosen a popular road, to be sure, but it's a dead end. Anyone who travels this road goes to hell; everyone who adopts this concept of earning God's favor and gaining heaven by being good—or at least being better than the other guy—is going the wrong way, and they will never enter the heaven that God has prepared for them.

2. So, what's the right way to be right with God? It's the road that focuses on Jesus. Jesus himself once said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6).* And Paul puts it this way in our text: *"All are justified,"* that is, declared not guilty, *"freely by [God's] grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."* The way to be right with God is the road of redemption that came by Christ Jesus

What is redemption? Quite simply, it's buying something back that once belonged to us. Perhaps we buy something at Kohl's or Walmart and find something wrong with it; maybe we just don't like it. If it's defective or we just don't like it, what do we do? We take it back, and they redeem it; they buy it back. That's redemption. You and I once belonged to God, but through Adam and Eve we sinned. There's something sinfully wrong with us—both in our nature and with our deeds, but God buys us back; he redeems us and makes us his again.

And how does he do that? Paul says that it's *"through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."* You and I could never be perfect, so Jesus was perfect for us. He was the perfect child that you and I could never be. He was the perfect citizen, even obeying the corrupt Roman government. He was the perfect friend, even when his friends abandoned him. He was the perfect worshiper, the perfect pray-er, the perfect listener of God's Word. We call this his active obedience. All this Jesus did as our substitute. Since we can't be perfect, Jesus was perfect in our place. And God graciously gives us the credit for Jesus' perfect life. Paul says that we *"are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."*

When God redeemed us, it was expensive. It cost him his best. Paul says, *"God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood."* For us and for our sins, God offered up the holy, precious blood of his own Son, his dearly beloved Jesus, who suffered and died on the cross. Instead of punishing us for our sins, God punished Jesus in our place. This we call his passive obedience. A gigantic, humongous, price (an atonement) was paid. Not your works, not my deeds, not our attempts to behave and be good, but *"the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from every sin" (1 Jn 1:7).*