

"Being Right Before God" - Romans 3:21-26

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Sure!*

1. His names was James West and he was my boyhood hero
2. He and his side kick Artemos Gordon where Secret Service agents who traveled the wild and wooly American West of the late 1800's in their private train
3. They went from place to place investigating various crimes
4. The show was called *Wild, Wild West*, and it was kind of a cross between *James Bond* and the *X Files*
5. In every episode, the West & Gordon would get caught in some trap that was impossible to escape from
6. And yet, surprise, surprise, they'd always end up getting out of it
 - a. whether it was some new fangled piece of spy gear
 - b. or a brilliant stroke of genius on their part
 - c. or some one else coming to their rescue
 - d. they always managed to escape certain death
 - e. and saved America from the sinister forces of evil
7. Even as a youngster, I realized that many of their escapes were pretty far fetched

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1. His name is Bond, James Bond; and he and his fellow secret agent, 006, have just blown up a secret Russian chemical weapons plant
 2. But now he is racing down a runway on a motorcycle, chasing after a plane that is taking off, with the bad guys behind him, chasing him
 3. At the end of the runway is a tall cliff, and time is running out
 4. In fact, it becomes clear that he will never reach the plane before it takes off
 5. Furthermore, there is no pilot in the plane
 6. Sure enough, the plane plummets off the end of the runway and nose dives toward the rocks below
 7. But 007 guns his bike, runs it off the cliff as well, and launches himself toward the falling plane
 8. Somehow, gravity works harder on him than the plane and he accelerates enough to be able to fly thru the air, grab hold of the plane and makes his way to the door
 9. Which he opens, climbs into the pilot's seat, and pulls the plane out of it's dive, just missing the ground

B. *Deus Ex Machina*

1. This plot device started with the ancient Greek playwrights
 - a. sometimes, their plots would get so complicated they would write the hero of their story into a corner with no way out
 - b. but since they didn't want him or her to die yet, they would have to

- manufacture some way of rescuing them
- c. so they would give instructions that at that point in the play, a box was to be hoisted over the stage to the spot where the hero was entrapped
- d. an actor playing the role of one of the Greek gods, would be hidden in the box
- e. and once the box was over the right spot, stage hands would use ropes and pulleys to lower him down, out of the box
- f. when he was within reach of the desperate hero, he would lift him up, the two would be hoisted back into the box, and then pulled back off stage
- 2. This was called "deus ex machina" in the Greek = God out of a machine
- 3. And it was only used by the really bad playwrights because they could think of no other way to save their hero

C. We Need A Miracle

1. What does all this have to do with Romans?
2. Just this: In Chapters 1-3, Paul has painted mankind into a corner with seemingly no way out
3. Man is trapped in sin and God's perfect judgment hangs over his head
4. It seems there is no way out
5. He needs nothing less than a miracle to save him
5. He needs a Deus ex machina - He needs nothing and no One less than God to rescue him
6. Let's see how Paul rescues man from his predicament . . .

II.TEXT

A. V. 21-22

1. The focus of our study today is vs. 21-26 of Ch. 3
2. But as I mentioned last week, because Paul presents one long seamless case for the Gospel of Christ in Romans, it's a bit difficult for us to jump into the middle of his argument
3. So, in order for us to get the right context, let's begin with v. 19

{19} Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

{20} Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

4. These two verses sum up all of Ch. 3
5. All mankind, the whole human race, is condemned under sin
 - a. there isn't one person who is perfectly good
 - b. everyone has broken the law of God
 - 1) whether the law as revealed to Moses and Israel
 - 2) or the law of God written on the heart
 - c. *everyone* stands guilty and condemned before God
6. Paul says that *no one* is just in God's sight based on their adherence to the

- law
7. He goes so far as to say that the law wasn't even given to *make* us holy
 8. Rather, it's purpose was to codify, and identify the fact and reality of sin in our lives
 9. The law shows us both what God requires of us, and how far short we fall of that standard
 10. Why does Paul write this? Why does he press this point so hard?
 11. He wants us to feel the pressure; he wants us to see the desperateness of our situation
 12. He wants us to see ourselves backed into a corner with no way out
 13. Only when we see, that *of ourselves*, we are utterly without hope, will we see and understand the *greatness of our rescue*
 14. V. 21 turns the corner of Paul's case against mankind to show the remedy
 15. And as he turns this corner, he settles a tremendous dilemma
 - a. how can God be both perfectly just *and* still forgive sinners?
 - b. how can He be both just *and* Justifier?
 16. God's perfect *justice* requires the condemnation of sinful humanity
 17. But His perfect love *yearns* for our salvation, not ruin
 18. How can these two attributes be reconciled?
 19. Only by a miracle
 - a. there is no apparent resolution
 - b. nothing but a miracle will do
 20. Paul reveals that miracle in v. 21 & 22

{21} But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

{22} even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.

21. Here's man's basic problem: He is *un-righteous*
 - a. what that means is he is not *Right*, he is *wrong*
 - b. the word "righteousness" simply means being right
 - c. it involves more than *doing* right
 - d. it means that a person's whole being; body, soul, and spirit stands in the place of God intends
 - e. since God is the Creator, He has the right to determine the proper place and role for every one of us
 - f. being *righteous* means fitting into that place and role perfectly
 22. But man is a rebel and turns away from God's plan
 23. And this means he is not *right with God*: he is un-righteous!
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24. In the Olympic high jump, because the competitors are all world class athletes, they start the bar at a height most people could never hope to get over
 - a. now, I don't know the exact height but let's say they start it at 5½ feet
 - b. almost every one of the athletes will make it over the bar at that height
 - c. then they will raise it an inch or two, and a few will drop out
 - d. the bar will keep going up till finally only one competitor is left jumping at somewhere over 7½ ft.

25. How high does God set the bar of acceptance? How good do we have to be to good enough for God?
26. The answer is: PERFECT!
27. The reason that seems unfair to us is because as we look around we don't see *any* perfect people
 - a. everyone messes up, everyone sins
 - b. and somehow we get it in our heads that means God should cut us some slack
28. But God's solution to the problem of our unrighteousness is much better than lowering the standard
29. Rather than requiring us to jump as high as we can and do our very best, He gives us the righteousness we need to meet the standard of His acceptance
30. That's what vs. 21 & 22 tell us
31. There is a righteousness that comes, not as a result of our deeds
 - a. not as a result of doing the law
 - b. but that comes as a *gift* from God
 - c. it is *His* righteousness, not *ours*
 - d. and He gives it to those who believe in Jesus Christ

B. Vs. 23-26

{23} [For there is no difference] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

1. That last phrase of v.22 belongs with v. 23
2. You see, Paul's point is that the way of salvation is the same for all
3. All fall short of God's standard because of sin
4. And all find salvation the same way
 - a. not by works
 - b. but by grace

{24} being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

{25} whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,

{26} to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

5. Here's how God can remain just and still forgive sinners; here's how he can be both just and Justifier
6. He doesn't just arbitrarily wave his hand over man's guilt and say, "Oh, forget it!"
7. No, the full weight of His judgment and wrath against sin was poured out on Christ at the cross
8. That's what it means when in v. 25 it says that Jesus was a *propitiation*
9. Let me take the time to explain this because it is central to the gospel
 - a. this word *propitiation* may be translated in some of your bibles as "atoning sacrifice"
 - b. and while that is technically correct, it misses the real point of why Paul picked this particular word
 - c. he used this word because it is the very same word the translators of the OT used when they were translating from Hebrew into Greek for the

- mercy seat* on the top of the ark of the covenant
- d. the mercy seat was located between the two cherubim which rose from the cover for the ark
 - e. it was just above the mercy seat, between the outstretched arms of the cherubim that God's presence was manifested in a cloud of light so glorious it was overwhelming to behold
 - f. the mercy seat was the place where the high priest would sprinkle the blood of the goat once a year on the day of Atonement
 - g. it was this sprinkling of blood on the top of the ark, which held the law of God, that symbolized the sacrifice of life, thus temporarily covering over man's guilt in breaking the law
9. When Paul says Jesus is our propitiation by His blood, he means that Jesus is our mercy seat
- a. He is the one who covers over our sin by offering His perfect life
 - b. as God looks at us now, He sees us through the blood of Christ and reckons the full weight of the law to be unbroken
 - c. Jesus is the meeting place between God and man
10. When we put our faith in Christ, specifically, when we put our faith in His death on our behalf, then God takes His perfect righteousness, and credits it to our account

III. CONCLUSION

A. *The Cost*

1. Salvation is a free gift to us, but that does not mean that it was without cost to God
2. It cost Him everything – It cost Him His Son
3. How do we respond to these things?
4. How else can we but with praise and thanksgiving

B. *New Attitude Toward Sin*

1. But you know, there is something else knowing this does for us
2. It changes our perspective on sin
3. If we truly believe that Jesus died for our sin, and that our sin is what put Him on the cross
4. Then it will produce within us a holy abhorrence of sin
5. Sin will lose it's grip on our lives as we see it for what it is
6. And the righteousness which eluded us by the works of the law will become a living reality in our lives as we simply seek to walk in faith with Jesus