**The-Heart-of-the-Gospel**

So like Andy said last week. I am going to bring the message this week. Last week Andy brought the bad news. I even told him after the service. Man, you are really good bad news preacher. And he is.

But this week I am going to bring the good news. You ready for it. It’s got 2 points: Work hard and be nice. Is that the good news? No, its not. It’s bad news and Romans 3 is packed with bad news. But it’s also packed with good news.

Tell a person they are a sinner and most will say, sure I have made a lot of mistakes. No ones perfect. But I think your going a little too far with this whole sin thing. Yet the Apostle Paul, wouldn’t agree. You must come to see the weight and gravity of your own sin. You must know, that you personally are a sinner, and that you, in yourself, is found no eternal hope.

You need to be lost before you can be saved. Until you know you are lost and separated from the love of a Holy God, under his righteous condemnation, you will never see the need for nor the beauty of the righteous savior Jesus Christ.

God must crush a man, before he can heal a man. There is none righteous, no not one, there is none that seek after God, there are none that do good. People might be seeking something. People might be understanding something. But it’s not the sovereign Lord of the Universe. The one true God of the Bible that people are seeking, or understanding.

Oh my friends, these are precise diagnostics. It is the good doctor telling us what the problem is. Imagine dying of a horrible dilibating disease and you don’t even know it. Your legs are withered. Your hands are shriveled. You have sores everywhere on your body. Puss and lesions. Ooozing with sickeness. The smell is wretched. Like a zombie. You live. You walk. But you are dead.

Spiritually dead. Living but dead. Alive but deathlike. Our lives a rancid mess of sinfulness. And the worst part is, we can’t even see it. Sinners, apart from the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit look at their lives and don’t see the problem as sin. In fact a lot of times, we think we are doing pretty good. And it is just not true. Every single one of us apart from the grace of God is 100% wretched.

Not 99%. … 100% … And what I want to say real quick before I get into my text is that it even takes the grace of God for us to be able to see this. People are not just sinners. People love their sin. This is horridness of sin. It blinds. People are totally unable to come to Christ on their own. Why? Because they don’t want to.

Men see there is a God and they hate him. Why do you think there is so many false religions in the world? Because we are fashioning God’s in our own image. Because we are blinded by the God of this world.

Mankind is shackled to desires. Under the dictatorship of morally corrupt natures. And yet pleased to be held captive there. Sinners apart from God’s grace are imprisoned souls who kiss their chains and refuse deliverance. Since the fall of our first parents, generation upon generation have indulged the passions of their sinful flesh. This is not freedom. How many more shootings do we need to see before we get this? How many more bombings? How many more scandals? It’s like Stockholm syndrome. You know that strange symptom where the one who was kidnapped begins to love the one who kidnapped them. And sin has the natural man hostage and they love it.

The Bible says, that light (that is Jesus) came into the world and people loved darkness more than the light. We are blindly groping about, thinking we can see. And we can’t. The cure is right there. Jesus is right there. Jesus is not far from any one of us. And we can’t see. We can’t see our sin. And we can’t see the savior.

And the way God works is almost as soon as he begins to reveal to us the wretchedness of our lostness, he also begins to show us the beautifulness of the savior. There is no coincidence that this section of verses i am about to preach … follows so closely behind the verses Andy preached last week.

We often think. People just need to know that Jesus loves them. Tell people about Jesus. And live like Jesus in front of them. Friends. Jesus walked the earth. Jesus could live like Jesus way better than we ever could. 1000’s saw him. And they killed him. It’s so much more than seeing Jesus. Dead sinful hearts that see Jesus want to kill Jesus. Dead sinful hearts that see Jesus don’t care about him. Dead sinful hearts that see Jesus try to with all their might to suppress the truth of Jesus and ignore him.

People grope around in the darkness, thinking they are in the light. And one of the ways God reveals this to them is to point blank smack dab put before them the utter darkness of their depravity.

I heard a person given his testimony a few weeks ago and one of the things he said is that there is nothing more powerful than when a man gets down wind of himself. And that’s what God was trying to do through Andy last week.

He was trying to get us down wind of ourselves. Oh you think your pretty good. Oh, you think you are not too bad. Here, smell yourself. Until a person gets a real whiff of themselves or sees themselves for who they really are, salvation in Jesus will never make any sense. And with that, let’s look at our text for today. vs. 21-26 of Romans 3 Within this text lies the answer to the greatest, most important question of all time.

It’s impossible to be human and not think on this question at least at some level. Whether consciously or sub-consciously. One need only look at the billions of man made religions all over the world throughout history. For there is as many self made religions as there has been people.

And the question is this: How can a righteous and good God declare wicked sinful people to be righteous and still remain righteous himself? Because friends that is what is required to achieve heaven - righteosness. God is Holy and perfect and just. And you need righteousness to be able to be in his presence. You don’t just need forgiveness. You need righteousness.

Friends, do you know what makes sense. Hell makes perfect sense. Heaven doesn’t make sense. How could a good God let sinful people go to heaven. We have all spurned and turned our backs on a good, holy and righteous God. From day one we have rebelled.

And yet instead of just giving up on us and casting us away from himself forever, he sent his son into the world to die for our sins. Even sends his Holy Spirit into the world to convict us of our sin and leads us to, compels us to, trust in the very one we crucified. How amazing is that. So let’s start **vs. 21** But now the righteousness of God is revealed to us” This might be bad news. After all, our main problem is that we are unrighteous sinners - and here revealed to us is the righteous judge. The judge of all the earth.

God is good. His righteousness is revealed but not just his righteousness. Here it is speaking of his righteous way of saving sinners that is being revealed. He is revealing a righteous way to say ‘not guilty’ to unrighteous people. In this passage, **vs. 21** of Romans chapter 3 is not talking about God’s attribute of righteousness, it is talking about God’s saving righteousness.

Do you remember vs. 17 of Romans chapter 1 where it says that Paul is not ashamed of the gospel, “For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith" That verse, pretty musth the thesis statement of the book of Romans, gives us hope as we are beginning to read the book that God is going to show his righteousness by finding a righteous way to save sinners from their sin.

This is indeed the good news. Which was born witness to all along by the Law and the Prophets. Which just means the OT scriptures. Paul’s Bible.

Apart from the law. This is most shocking. This is what makes Christianity different from every other religion in the world. People know there is a God. People know they are separated from him. But what people can’t seem to get is that we are unable to work our way to or make ourselves acceptable before him.

Paul spends the first 3 chapters of this book showing that not even the best nation in the world Israel, with the best religion in the world with the best laws could even ever even keep those laws. Why? Because we are sinners. Maybe, the greatest proofs of our sinfulness is it takes so much to prove it to us. Spiritually blind people are not just blind, but they are blind to their blindness. So if we are going to be saved, it must be apart from the law.

This righteous way to be saved, that does not diminish God’s righteousness, that is in accord with all of God’s righteous attributes. **vs. 22** … comes through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. There is no distinction. There is an exception, though. Salvation is only for the believing ones. This way is without distinction. For any and all kinds of people in every tribe, tongue and nation. Short people, tall people, fat people, skinny people and all peoples in between.

Doesn’t matter if your black or white or yellow or brown. Doesn’t matter if your 95 years old or 5 years old. Doesn’t matter if you speak Urdu or English. All without distinction. But not all without exception. This righteous way of salvation is only for the believing ones. **vs. 23 -** Without exception this is true. All have sinned. Not only are we born into this world as sinners. But we actually sin. Sinners sin. Imagine that. But what is sin?

Sin is valuing anything in the world more than we value God. Sin is wanting God’s gifts but not wanting the God who gives us those gifts. Sin is breaking God’s laws and making our own laws. Sin is knowing God but refusing to honor him and give thanks to him. And every motive of every heart falls short of his glory.

God created humans to be glorious because we reflect the glory of God just as the moon reflects the sun. We were created in the image of God. And our purpose was to reflect who God is back to God. To worship him. God created to glorify himself. All of creation is to redound to the glory of God.

But we gave up that glory to run our own live independently of God. And as a result we have ruined our lives and the whole world by our rebellion. You want to know what’s wrong with the world. Look no further than yourself and the sin that indwells you and every single person in the world. Sin is the problem with this world.

How can we and this cursed world receive again the glory that was once ours we so foolishly exchanged? If we could say it in one sentence it would be. God saves sinners through Jesus Christ. Friends, that’s the gospel. The gospel is not. Work hard and be nice. The gospel is God saves sinners through Jesus Christ.

We need to do another great exchange. We need to exchange the glory of self for the glory of God. But we need to remember this section is good news! Verse 21 is the start of good news in this book. Falling short of the glory of God is good news. Because God saves sinners. If your a sinner and you know it. God came to save you.

When you couple God’s law with dead hearts what you get is death. Spiritual death. And so what we need is to be rescued. We don’t need better rules. God’s law is the best rules. You can’t get

any better. What we need a savior. Sinners need a savior.

And so we are at **vs. 24** “and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in

Christ Jesus”

For the believing ones**.** For the ones connected to Jesus Christ through faith, we are justified. That is given a right standing before God. Once, under God’s wrath, standing rightly condemned. Under his law. Lawbreakers. Glory-exchangers. But now justified. You could say, we were once what the first 3 chapters of Romans talks about.

Sinful. Every inclination of our heart that. Playing itself out in everything that we do. But now we are righteous by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. There was a price paid. Jesus gave his life. That is what redemption means. A buying back. And Jesus bought us back from the slave market of sin.

We all want to boast in our free will. But did you know that Free will is a slave. There is something under your will, and it is your nature. You are either a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness. And before Jesus Christ bought us. Redeemed us from the slave market of sin. Our will was enslaved to sin. Because sin was our very nature. And every choice, every action we ever made was sinful.

But glory be to God these verses we are in today are in the Bible. There is redemption from sin in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:24) We have been bought with the precious blood. We are his. Purchased possessions. Given the Holy Spirit as a downpayment and seal but also as power to persevere in living out our new identity. He has changed us, yes indeed, is changing us and one day will completely change us.

Look at the word there in verse 25, “propitiation”. That’s a big word. You ever want to sound really smart, just use that word once in a while. Honey I am going to run down to the store and propitiation some gas for the snow blower. No. No. In a very serious way this is one of the most important words in the Bible. Propitiation is if we will understand it, is at the very heart of the gospel.

**vs. 25,** “whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.” Remember that question I said this text would answer: How can a righteous and good God declare sinful people to be righteous and still remain righteous himself? We are starting to get to the heart of it hear.

**Proverbs 17:15**. says, “He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord. There is nothing worse than to be an abomination before God. And yet vs. 24 in Romans 3, part of our text today, says that we are justified before God because of Jesus. And yet we are wicked sinners.

Do you see the dilemma? Men throughout the history of the world have seen the dilemma. Why do you think Men and Women try so hard to clean themselves up? Work hard and be nice. If I were to flash before our eyes the thoughts and intents of all our hearts throughout the week on this screen here. Everyone of us would be horrified at the very own things we have thought about.

Listen friends, if God is just, he cannot forgive you. No matter how much you clean yourself up. Do you know in the Muslim religion. In the Hadith. They have a tradition. They have a story. Listen to this. It’s called the man who killed 99:

“A man who had killed ninety-nine people who went to the most learned person on the earth. He went and told him about his past, explaining that he wished to repent, and become a better person. "I wonder if Allah will pardon me?" he asked. The monk said no. And the man killed him. So he has now killed 100 men.

He then found another worthy individual and told him that he had killed a hundred people. "I wonder," he said, "whether Allah will pardon me if I repent?"Of course you will be pardoned; repent at once. I have just one piece of advice for you: avoid the company of wicked people and mix with good people, for bad company leads into sin:" The man repented. Then, turning his back on bad company, he set off to find the neighborhood where the righteous people lived. Shortly, he died; and there arose a dispute between the angels of mercy and the angels of torment. The angels of mercy pleaded, ‘This man has come with a repenting heart to Allah,’ and the angels of punishment argued, ‘He never did a virtuous deed in his life.’ Then there appeared another angel who was to be the arbitrator of the dispute.

He said, `Measure the distance between the two lands. He will be considered belonging to the land to which he is nearer.’ They measured the ground. Because the man had just set out, he was closer to the wicked. But because he was sincere in his repentance, the Lord moved the spot where he lay and brought it to just outside the city of the good people. He was handed over to the angels of mercy.

Is that just? Can God just say, well our intentions were good? Just think if society operated that way. You see, in Islam, Allah may be powerful but he is not just. In fact, at the end of the day, in all religions in the world, including Islam, you will never know if you’ve ever attained the standard. Seriously, you know there is a standard. But it moves. You will never know if you have met it. So what’s the solution? How can a just God, the real God of the Bible, forgive sinners and still be just?

You see God is just and a just God cannot declare something righteous that is not righteous. To do so would be against who he is in himself. God himself says it would be an abomination. This is why a propitiation had to be made. A propitiation is a sacrifice, a payment that satisfies justice. It’s the very heart of the gospel. Now, what is that payment? Well, first of all that payment has to be a man. A man has to die.

Man has sinned. Man must die. The blood of bulls and goats will not do. A man must die. Does anyone qualify? God becoming a man was necessary to bring salvation? The one who died on the tree must be more than a man. He must be the God man. Salvation is of the Lord. The horrendous doctrine of the Jehovah’s Witnesses says that Jesus was a creature, was a created being.

And in saying that, they are saying the one who died and provided salvation, that one is not God. And God is not our Savior. That is an abomination. Scriptures all throughout declares that salvation is of the Lord and only Yahweh, only God saves. So the one who will save his people from their sins, that one named Jesus must be God.

Then there is another reason. A life has to be given. Who has life to give? Even if you were fit to die for your own sins, you have no life. For where does your life come? It comes from God. You don’t give yourself life. Your life has been given to you. And you breathe right now because of God.

But Jesus said, “I have authority to lay down my life and authority to take it up again.” He is life. He borrows it from no one. And the last reason Jesus had to die. The last reason it had to be Jesus Christ, is that no other payment to satisfy justice would do. Because you think about it, how in the world can one man suffering a few hours on a cross save multitudes of men with multitudes of sin from an eternity in hell?

Because within that one man is contained more worth than anything and everything put together. You take everything, all the oceans, all the galaxies, all the stars, all the men and women throughout history and you put it all on one side of the scale. And you put the man Jesus Christ on the other side of that scale. He outweighs them all. He is the perfect sacrifice of infinite value. He is the only one worthy to die for the sins of the world.

And often we think of the cross. We think of the beatings. We think of the whips. We think of the nails pierced through the hands. And it’s horrible. It’s horrible. But do you think the Father looked down and counted those things as punishment for our sin. No my friends, when you are saved, you are not saved because a bunch of soldiers got together and beat Jesus up. You are saved because Jesus bore the wrath of God.

What do you think was in the cup when Jesus cried out in the garden the night before? Let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but thine will be done. Jesus went to the cross with joy. But not without trembling. You think he was afraid of whips and nails? He is the Lord of glory! Isaiah 53:10, “It pleased God the Father to crush his son.”

That was what was in the cup? On the cross, the Son of God took the cup of God’s justice, his fierce wrath, of his hatred against sin and he drank it all down. Then cried out, “It is finished” We read of another story. This story is true. Not like the Islamic one. This one in the Bible. And God was going to destroy Sodom and Gomorah. But Abraham interceding for the city, goes to God. This is found in Genesis 18,

**vs. 23** “Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? **24** Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? **25** Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” **26** And the Lord said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

And Abraham goes on down the list until he gets to ten, And God says vs. 32 “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” The Bible tells us that God could not find 10 righteous in that city because in vs. 24 of Genesis 19 it says, “ the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven.”

God’s judgment fell, not because he is cruel, harsh or lacking in love. It happened because God is just and righteous. By all rights this judgement would be the fate of the entire human race. Not only are there not 10 in Sodom, there are not 10 in the whole world. There is none righteous, no not one.

And yet there is another story, this one involving Abraham as well. A few chapter later in the book of Genesis. You recall the story. Found in chapter 22. Starts out with theses words: “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” **2** He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

And as we read the story. Abraham goes to the mountain. Abraham ties his son. He brings forth the knife. About to sacrifice his son. He rears back and is about to slam the knife down into the heart of his only son and his hand is stayed. A different sacrifice is provided, a ram caught in a thicket. But the story doesn’t end there. Because it is God who took that knife out of the hand of Abraham and 2,000 yrs. later slams the knife down into his only begotten Son - and slaughters him upon that tree.

You see, every man ever born is born in sin. And God is such that he is both loving and just God’s justice cries out, “Condemn the sinner” and yet God’s love also cries out, “Forgive the sinner”. Did his justice or his love win? Most people will say his love. If so, then God’s justice lost and his is no longer a righteous. And if God is not righteous, we are still lost in our sins with no hope of them ever being taken care of.

Others will say, “Oh, then God’s justice won” If so, his love lost, and we must die in our sins and go to hell forever. I ask again. Did his justice win or his love win? Both of them won! How? Through the cross of Jesus Christ. On the cross the sinner was condemned by God in the person of Jesus Christ. God’s justice won.

And on the cross the sinner was forgiven by God in the person of Jesus Christ. God’s love won. God found a way to be both just and justifier. A righteous way to save sinners. Why was Christ Jesus crucified publicly in such a bloody horrific way? **Vs. 26**, “This was to show God’s righteousness.” Why? “Because in this divine forbearance He had passed over former sins.”

You know there is not much we know about the devil except that he was created by God and he fell. But there is a sense in which there was this creature. He was good and right and beautiful in everything. He rebelled against the throne of God. When he did, did God show him mercy? No, none, only perfect justice. Now, that one who fell is called the accuser and the father of lies. What is the greatest problem? God, if you are just, why didn’t you kill Adam? Why did you give him a promise of salvation? God, if you are just during the flood, why didn’t you kill Noah? And, God, Abraham, your friend, he put his own wife in jeopardy because he was a coward. And Moses, he was a murderer. David, might I tell you, a man after your own heart, you say. He was an adulterer and a murderer and you call him a son?

What has happened to the God of all the earth? It seems like you no longer does right. What is this God? I committed a sin against your throne and these things made out of the dust of the ground, rebel against you every day. How can you show mercy to them and not to me? And 2,000 years ago God answered the question. He looked down and he said, “Do you want to know how I can save Noah? Do you want to know how I can be friends with Abraham? You want to know how I can call David my son? Because my only begotten Son died for them all.

And it is through him, the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world that everyone who has ever been reconciled to God, has been reconciled because of the death of the Son of God. And we can say that we are justified through the death of the Son. But we can also say that God is justified through the death of his Son as well. He is both the just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

He justifies the wicked and yet still he is just. Because His son died to pay their debt. But he did not stay dead. “He has risen.” The resurrection is proof that the payment Christ made fully satisfied the justice of God. If there was no propitiation. God would not be satisfied. Jesus would still be dead. And we would be doomed.

So Jesus died but he rose again. And not only did he rise again, but he ascended into glory. **Psalm 24:3 reads, “**Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Who could go there for us? Who could stand?

**Vs. 4, “**He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. No one but Christ. Very God, and very man. He lived a perfect life. In absolute obedience to the will of God. He bore the sins of his people and was crushed under the Father’s wrath. In dying he satisfied justice. The Father raised him from the dead. And then he ascended up to glory.

Christ is God, but also Christ the man did more than any man could ever imagine. He ascended up and stood outside the very gates of heaven and he cried out, **vs. 7 of Psalm 24**, “Lift up your heads, oh gates, and be lifted up old ancient doors that the King of glory may come in.” And with absolute astonishment, heaven answers back and says, “Who is this King of glory?” Who is this one who dares command these gates? Who is it who would dare lay his hand to the latch of these doors? These doors open for no man. Who is it?

He answers back and he says this. I will tell you who it is. **vs. 8** “It is the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, oh gates, and lift them up old ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.” And for the first time in all of time, those doors obeyed a man’s voice. And they threw themselves open as all of creation and the angels obey.

They threw themselves open and in walked the King of glory, Jesus Christ the Son of God walked in on our behalf. And he walks up to the Father and he sits down at the Father’s right hand. And I would suppose, maybe, the Father gives him a glance and says, “It is finished.” And he looks at his Father and says, “Father, it is finished, indeed.” And on that throne he will sit until every enemy has been made his footstool. He is the King of glory.

If God is satisfied and if God is for us, who can be against us? The one who will judge the world, Jesus, is the one who died for us. No one can ultimately stand against us. Oh there will be seasons. But there is an ultimate throne room of heaven which matters most. Keep your eyes fixed.

A.W Tozer once said: The God who by the word of the gospel proclaims men free, by the power of the gospel actually makes them free. Walk in the freedom. You don’t ever have to worry if you have repented enough. Your repentance doesn’t save you. Your faith doesn’t save you. Those are just conduits God uses to get you to him. Jesus saves. No one else died and rose again for your sins. Only Jesus did. The fight of faith is a fight to believe this. That Jesus is enough.