

Intro: One hundred and thirty-two years ago (from this Thursday), on September 22, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation that he later called "the central act of my administration, and the greatest event of the 19th century" (Compton's Encyclopedia). What was it? It was the proclamation that promised freedom for the slaves who were held in any of the Confederate states that did not return to the Union by the end of the year. The Confederate states and their slaveholders paid no attention to Lincoln's statement. Therefore, on January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued the final proclamation, the "Emancipation Proclamation." His statement brought freedom to thousands who had not known freedom. Lincoln's proclamation set men free.

How does God set a person free? The Bible teaches that we are all born into this world as slaves--slaves to sin. How does God set a slave free? Jesus said in John 8:36, "If the Son, therefore, shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." Freedom is available through the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. But how does it happen? How does God set us free?

That's the issue God explains for us in His Word, in Romans 3:23-26. These verses in Romans 3 are in essence "God's Emancipation Proclamation."

Proposition: In God's Emancipation Proclamation in Romans 3:23-26, we learn that our freedom is linked to two proclamations made by God.

- I. Proclamation #1: Man has a problem (23).
 - A. We have sinned.
 - B. We are separated from God.
- II. Proclamation #2: God has a provision (24-26).
 - A. What has God done? (24-25)
 1. Justification
 2. Redemption
 3. Propitiation
 4. Remission
 - B. What must we do? (26)

Freedom. It's a lovely word. We sing songs about it. But this morning our focus is on personal freedom. How can we experience personal freedom? How can we be free from paralyzing habits? How can we experience freedom from emotional distress? To find out, we have to go back to the root cause.

I. Proclamation #1: Man has a problem (23).

The book of Romans is about that problem, and God's solution for the problem. Mankind has a problem. It inflicts every one of us (22). What is it? It's twofold.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

A. We have sinned.

V 23 "For all have sinned." Notice the connective word "for." V 21 begins the second major section of Romans. The first three chapters focused on WHO it is that needs to be set free and made right with God. The issue in section two is HOW--How does God set us free, and make us right with Himself?

He doesn't do it by means of the "Law," as we saw last week. The Law is good, but it can't save. The Law opens our eyes to our guilt, to our depravity, but it can't set us free. The Law points us to God's remedy in Jesus Christ. All men need Christ. Why?

V 23 tells us, pure and simple. "FOR, all have sinned." Literally, the phrase reads, "For all sinned." We have "missed the mark" for which we were created. The entire human race plunged into sin when the first man, Adam, sinned. We read in Rom 5:12, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." Adam acted as our federal head, our representative. When he sinned, it's as if we (as his descendants) were there. But don't blame Adam. Yes, we inherited his sin, but we have sinned, too.

Years ago, a woman was caught in the very act of adultery. In fact, she was caught by several religious leaders. They brought her to a trial of sorts. The evidence was clear. Jesus was there, and they asked Him, "Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned; but what sayest thou? (Jn 8:4-5)" It was a set-up. The leaders were trying to frame Jesus. If He said, "Stone her," He would be in violation of Roman law, for the Jews did not have the authorization to issue the death penalty. If He said, "Don't stone her," He would be in violation of Mosaic law. Do you remember what He did? He stooped down, wrote something on the ground with His finger, and for several minutes, said nothing. Then finally, these words, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her (Jn 8:7)." That's an incredible statement, yet something just as amazing is the impact those words had on the crowd. "And they who heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last (9)." All the accusers left. Who left first? The oldest. Why the oldest? Because as they scanned their lives, they knew best that they were not without sin.

Perhaps in our youth, we are naïve about our invincibility, about our "uprightness." But after walking through this murky, sin-cursed world for a few years, we soon learn the undeniable truth about ourselves. We are sinners, every one of us.

There's a second aspect to our problem.

B. We are separated from God.

V 23 "And come short of the glory of God." God says of man in Isa 43:7, "I have created him for my glory." We have fallen short of the ideal God had in mind when He made us. But the problem is more severe. The tense of the verb is present, which indicates continuous action. The idea is this. We "keep coming short" of the glory of God.

The LB paraphrases, "All fall short of God's glorious ideal." The TEV says, "All men have sinned and are far away from God's saving presence." In short, our problem is this. We are separated from God. We don't have a relationship with God.

We keep missing God's standard. Thus, we are condemned to the judgment of eternal separation from God. What a horrible punishment!

It's amazing to me that God wants us to share His splendor, but He does. He created us to be like Him, to be Christlike. His aim is that we would reflect His glory. II Thes 2:14 reveals, "Unto which he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." But our sin keeps throwing a wrench in the cog.

By the way, v 23 is describing Christians, too. All have sinned, and all keep coming short of the glory of God. Even after being saved, we keep falling short. Not until we see Him will we be like Him in all His glory.

Note: Don't lose sight of this. God's aim is that we reflect His glory. His goal is to make us holy, not necessarily happy. That's why He allows trials in our lives, to mold us so we will reflect His glory.

Here's God's first proclamation. Man has a problem. We are sinners, and we are separated from God. Allow me to make an observation. Most people don't have a problem with the first part of v 23. They know they are sinners. That's obvious. Why then don't they trust Christ? There are two possible reasons.

One is that they don't know they need to. They haven't heard. The world is full of such people who have yet to hear the good news of Christ.

But there's a second reason many people don't trust Christ. They don't believe the last part of v 23. They don't really believe they have "fallen short." They're not convinced that they are that bad off, that they are incapable of reaching God. Why not? Because they underestimate the greatness of God, and they overestimate the ability of man.

The common conception of the average person on the street is, "If I'm a good person, if I go to church (at least some), if I do more benevolent deeds than bad deeds, then I'm Ok. I'm right with God." Is that right? Not according to v 23.

To illustrate, let's play a game. It's called "Jump to the Moon" game. The object is straightforward--to jump to the moon. The rules are simple. 1) Those who reach the moon, win. Those who don't, lose. 2) There are no prizes for "almost." 3) Good intentions don't count. 4) No spaceships permitted. 5) Everyone is in the game, even those who don't try.

What would happen if we played the "Jump to the Moon" game? Some would jump higher than others, wouldn't they? Michael Jordan's finger tips might come close to the 12' mark. Yours might reach 8'. But what is either compared to 100 thousand+ miles?! 12 feet might impress the rest of the contestants on earth, but it doesn't impress the judge on the moon.

So it is with God's glory. On our own, none of us can come close. We all fall short. We lose. Then, when the game is over, God reaches down and picks us up!

How does God do it? We find out in proclamation #2.

II. Proclamation #2: God has a provision (24-26).

V 24 begins with a participle, "Being justified freely by His grace." God made a provision to take care of our problem. The provision is Jesus Christ. By the way, if you don't believe v 23, v 24 will make absolutely no sense. If v 23 is not true, then Jesus Christ was the greatest fool who ever lived, for He shed His blood to save people

who were Ok to begin with. But the truth is this. God did for us what we could not do on our own.

A. What has God done? (24-25)

Definitions are so important in life. It's vital that we define our terms, especially here. Don't be intimidated by the \$100 terms Paul uses in vv 24-25. They are good terms. If we want to grasp what God has done, we need to grasp what these terms mean.

1. Justification

V 24 "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." What is justification? Justification is a legal term. It's an act, not a process. It means "to declare righteous." Its root is the same as the root in the word translated "righteousness" throughout Romans.

What is a good definition for justification? A popular one is "just as if I'd never sinned." That's Ok, but it's only half the story. When God justifies a sinner, He not only takes away sin, but He imputes righteousness. He declares that sinner to be just as righteous as His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. The Westminster Shorter Catechism says it is, "an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight" (Bruce, 103). As a good, working definition, here's one-- Justification is the act of God whereby He declares a sinner to be righteous based on the merit of Christ. It does not mean "to make righteous," but "to declare righteous."

How does God do it? How does He justify a sinner? Notice the modifiers in v 24. First, we have been justified "freely." It's a gift, not a wage. We don't earn it. Freely doesn't mean "cheap," for justification was very costly for Him. The point is that since it's a gift, we need add nothing to it. Our part is to receive it.

Second, we are justified "by His grace." The word "grace" appears 24 times in Romans. We are justified on the basis of the sheer kindness of God. God did not justify us because we are "worthy." It has nothing to do with "worth" but everything to do with grace.

Third, justification is accomplished "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." It's something God does, not man. Which brings us to our second key word.

2. Redemption

God "couldn't" justify a sinner without an objective basis. A holy God can't overlook sin. Sin must be dealt with. And it was. Redemption is the basis of justification.

In Paul's day, the infamous slave market was a tragic, common sight. A defenseless person was forced to stand before the prospective buyers on the slave block. The bidding began. The auction concluded with the highest bid. The new owner paid the "lutron"--the Greek word for "ransom price."

There is a scene in the movie "Ben Hur" which illustrates. The hero, Judah Ben Hur was raised in privilege in Jerusalem, but then suffered a series of misfortunes. He was arrested by the Romans, judged, and condemned to serve out his life in the Roman galleys. His prestige gone, Ben Hur was forced to row his life away in the depths of a

ship. The meaninglessness of his existence was brought home by the cruel admiral who said, "We keep you alive to serve this ship." That's what slavery is, not living, but existing in sheer bondage.

As the story unfolds, there is a battle and the slaves on the ship are set free. Judah Ben Hur rescued the admiral. He is adopted as the admiral's son, and is given a position of power and authority again.

That's what redemption is--to be delivered from bondage (Boice, Our Savior God, 140). The English word redemption comes from two Latin words: "again" + "to acquire," hence, "to acquire again," or "to buy back." Redemption is the payment God made to set sinners free from sin. It was a costly payment, for it cost the very life-blood of God's Son. Which brings us to word #3.

3. *Propitiation*

This is a confusing word in English, and equally so in Greek. Scholars debate its meaning. One lexicon defined the word, "that which expiates or propitiates" (doesn't clarify very much!). In secular Greek, it referred to the sacrifices to pagan deities in an attempt to appease them, and pacify their anger (Briscoe, 93). In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), the term is used to refer to the "mercy seat."

The mercy seat was in the Jewish tabernacle, and later the temple. The High Priest would go into the Holy of Holies and stand before the Ark of the Covenant. Inside the Ark were the stone tablets of the Law. On top of the Ark was a golden lid. On that lid the priest sprinkled blood from a sacrificed animal. That was called the "mercy seat."

Frederick Faber penned these words over a century ago, "There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea; There's a kindness in His justice which is more than liberty. There is welcome for the sinner and more graces for the good; There is mercy with the Savior, there is healing in His blood. For the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind, and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind. If our love were but more simple, we should take Him at His word, and our lives would be all sun-shine in the sweetness of our Lord." (Great Hymns of the Faith, 445).

Here we have what Jean Calvin called "the very marrow of theology (McGee, 70)." God "set forth" His Son to be a propitiation. God is the sole architect of salvation (McGee, 71). In a sense, God had a dilemma. He had to satisfy the demands of His holiness, which meant He had to deal justly with sin and the sinner. Yet He likewise had to act consistently with His grace, by which He saves the sinner. How could He do both? He designed His own Son to be our "mercy seat." He allowed His Son to be a propitiation, to shed His own precious blood. The result of which is...

4. *Remission*

V 25 "to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." Remission means "to let go, to pass over." Because of the shedding of the blood of Christ, God passed over sins that are past. That refers to sins committed by people who lived before the Cross.

In the Old Testament, people had to bring a lamb to the altar. That lamb's blood was shed. Did it take away sin? No. It pointed ahead to the coming Lamb of God. As J. Vernon McGee says, "Suppose you'd been there when Abel brought a little lamb to God, 'Abel, do you think this little lamb is going to take away your sin?' He would have said no. And you would have said, 'Then why did you bring it?' His answer would have been, 'God required it. God commanded us to bring it.'

Bringing a sacrifice didn't save Abel. Looking ahead by faith to the coming Lamb of God saved Abel (Heb 11:4). You see, when Christ came, and shed His blood, He paid for all the sins committed prior to the Cross.

You say, "Well, what about us this side of the Cross?" V 26 "To declare, I say, at this time His righteousness, that He might be just, and the justifier of Him who believeth in Jesus." We don't bring sacrifices to altars anymore. We look to the cross for the remission of sins.

Now let's tie these four words together. Justification--God declares a sinner to be righteous in the merit of His Son. How? Through the Redemption He provided in Christ--He paid the ransom for our freedom. What was that price? The Propitiation--the blood of Jesus Christ was shed for our cleansing. And we experience Remission--our sins have been removed.

Why did God go to such lengths to save us? That He might be "just"--A holy God can't say, "Ah, let's just forget it. Sin's no big deal." And that He might be the "justifier." Motivated by love we cannot comprehend, He declares us right with Him.

This truth can literally set you free. It did John Bunyan. Bunyan, who lived centuries ago and who penned Pilgrim's Progress, was a man who was overwhelmed by the burden of his guilt and sin. Ponder his own testimony (Bruce, 104), "As I was walking up and down in the house, as a man in a most woful state, that word of God took hold of my heart, Ye are 'justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus' (Rom 3:24). But oh, what a turn it made upon me! Now was I as one awakened out of some troublesome sleep and dream, and listening to this heavenly sentence, I was as if I had heard it thus expounded to me: Sinner, thou thinkest that because of thy sins and infirmities I cannot save thy soul, but behold my Son is by me, and upon him I look, and not on thee, and will deal with thee according as I am pleased with him."

That's it. Yet one question remains. We've answered, "What did God do?"

B. What must we do? (26)

The answer is simple. The person whom God sets free is the person who "believes in Jesus" (26). We can't free ourselves. It's not the person who "jumps the highest" that reaches God. You may think, "Hey, I do more good than half the church-goers in this town." Maybe you do, but what difference does it make? Only Jesus can save. Only Jesus can set us free.