



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 3:9-20

Romans

"A Race in Ruins"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Well, our text this morning is Romans 3:9-20. If you have been here and following along, this ends the first major section in the book in which Paul is bringing in an indictment against mankind. And so we come to the end of his indictment, his case against the human race, with verse 9.

"What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written,

'There is none righteous, not even one;/There is none who understands/There is none who seeks for God/All have turned aside, together they have become useless/There is none who does good/There is not even one.'

'Their throat is an open grave/With their tongues they keep deceiving,' 'The poison of asps is under their lips'; 'Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness'; 'Their feet are swift to shed blood/Destruction and misery are in their paths/And the path of peace they have known.' 'There is no fear of God before their eyes.'

"Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time together in it. Let's bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for this time together. We thank You for this opportunity to simply open the Bible and read it, because we read Your inherent word, we read truth that comes from You and is the authority for our lives, and so we pray You'd bless us as we study this in some depth. As we consider its meaning, we pray that the Spirit of God would open our hearts to receive the truth of it and apply it properly.

And we're thankful, Father, that we're not alone in this, that we do have the third person of the Trinity, that He does teach us that the ministry of the word is not left to an individual, that it is not left to the words of one man, but we have a divine teacher to instruct us and guide us in our thinking. And we pray that His ministry would go unhindered this morning.

Prepare our hearts for our time of study. Open our hearts to receive Your truth. Guide us and enable us to think clearly about the things that we will and study, and build us up in the faith. It is in this way that we're changed, that we're transformed, that we're made like Christ, that we become increasingly bearers of His image, and so we pray for that. May that be the result of our time together this morning and may it be a good time of equipping us for the week ahead.

Bless the families in this church. This is an age, Father, in which the family is under assault and we pray that You would protect it, and that You would protect the Christian families in this nation and Christian families abroad and families in this church.

We pray that You'd bless us in many ways, Father. We are needy in all aspects of life. Spiritually we're needy, and we see that from our text this morning. And what we are by nature is completely undone. There's none righteous. But even as believers, we're dependent upon You constantly for our spiritual life and growth, and we are dependent upon You for the material things of life as well, and so we pray for those who are in particular need today.

We pray for those who are sick or who are facing surgery or recovering from surgery; bless them. We pray for those who are discouraged, for various reasons; give them encouragement. Through all of these difficulties, Lord, bring people to Your throne, the throne of grace, to find help in time of need. That is one of the blessings of affliction. We don't like affliction. We recoil from it, Father, but it does have a good purpose in that it reminds us of our desperate need, our dependence upon You, and in that condition, we tend to come to You. We are drawn to the throne of grace, and so may that be the effect of difficulty in the lives of those who are suffering at this time.

But we pray for relief. We pray for blessing for them. And we pray that you'd give us thankful hearts, we who enjoy health, enjoy employment, enjoying the comforts and the pleasant aspects of life. May we be thankful, because, Father, all of that comes from You. We have much. We have far more than we realize. And we should be thankful every moment of our lives. And so make us thankful and appreciative.

Bless us this evening when we come back to celebrate the Lord's supper, as we remember His death for us and remember that we do that only until He comes, and the message in that is that He's coming. Someday - and you know the day, Father; You've said it. It's fixed. It will happen. Someday You will tell Your Son to arise and He will stand up from the throne and He will come back into this world and He will conquer the enemy and He will establish His kingdom. May we live for that day and we do not live for this world, which is passing away, but live for the world to come.

Bless us to that end this morning as we study this text, and bless us in preparation for our time of study together with this final hymn. We look to You to bless and pray these things in Christ name. Amen.

[Message] There's a children's story that is well known because of its humor and wisdom, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, about a king who was fooled into thinking that he was wearing elegant clothes when he was really wearing nothing. It gives insight into human

nature, because it illustrates pride produces self-deception, when two conmen convinced the king that they could make for him clothes that were invisible to all but the wise and the pure and heart, so no one was ready to admit that he or she couldn't see what wasn't there. They convinced themselves that the king had the most elegant, beautiful garments that they had ever seen.

Wasn't until the day of the great parade while the king was strutting down the street, proud of his new suit, that a child innocently blurted out the truth. "The emperor has no clothes." That was when everyone, even the emperor, realized the truth.

Pride produces self-deception, but the truth, even when is delivered by a child, can deliver people from it. And in Romans 1:18-3:20, Paul speaks truth. He exposes the condition of mankind, the guilt of all men before God and their need of salvation.

Paul divides the world into two parts. We can do that in various ways, the legitimate ways. The world is divided into two parts in terms of men and women, male and female. It's divided in terms of slave and free. Divided, most importantly, in terms of the saved and the non-saved.

But Paul divides in terms of Jew and Gentile, and then like a prosecutor, he indicts both. The Gentiles took pride in their wisdom. The Jews took pride in their purity. They all thought that they were properly clothes when Paul tells them that they were really all naked. Professing to be wise, he said to the Gentiles they became fools and took a downward path to corruption. The Jew who thought that he was clothed in righteousness, Paul said, well, they practice the same things as the pagans.

All mankind is fallen and without excuse. Paul even gave the Jews an opportunity to respond to the charges that he made in chapter 2. We read that last week at the beginning of chapter 3. But all of their responses, their replies, their countercharges, proved to be groundless. And now in 3:9-20, Paul brings his argument to an end

and sums up his case by gathering all mankind together and condemning it.

He begins his conclusion with two brief questions. "What then? Are we better than they?" In other words, how then shall we conclude this case? Are we to conclude by saying that the Jews are better than the Gentiles? He has stated that they had better advantages than Gentiles, but they squandered them through unbelief.

Faith must accompany advantages for those advantages to be of benefit. And the Jewish people as a whole, not all, but as a whole, did not believe the great blessings, the great truths that were given about the coming Messiah. As a result, they were not better. Not at all, he said, for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin.

Now in principle the same question could be put to the Gentiles who prided themselves on being the wise and the cultured and the powerful of the world. In fact, they ruled the world. But the answer would be the same. No one is better. No one is exempt from judgment. The whole human race, Paul says, is under sin. It is under the guilt of sin and under the power of sin. Sin is like some terrible tyrant that holds mankind in its grip. It's like a jailor that keeps all mankind shut up in sin so that men and women walk, they live their lives in the way of sin.

And we're reminded of that every day. You go to work, you're reminded of it on the highway. You're reminded of it there at the office, or at school, or wherever you may be and the associations that you have as you rub shoulders with various people. You see that. But even if a person were a recluse and shut himself up or herself up in their house, if they get the daily newspaper or they watch the evening news, there are plenty of illustrations that verify Paul's statement that show the sorry condition that man is in.

A few years ago with ethnic violence in Rwanda gave us scenes on the nightly news of carnage and villages and corpses floating down rivers, news people were asking the question how could this happen?

Just after peace had been established there, a reporter asked that question of an African soldier who was standing along the road as a peacekeeper. "What would cause one tribe to commit such atrocities against another?" And he said, "Original sin."

That's a theological answer and that's a theological term not found in the Bible, but it expresses Biblical truth, that man has a sinful nature, so that sin has tainted every aspect of man, tainted him at every point, in his thoughts and in his deeds.

This sinful nature, this original sin, originated with Adam and has been mysteriously passed on to all of his descendants. When he sinned in the garden, he fell and he brought down all mankind with him. As a result, we are a race in ruins. And by nature, man is morally and spiritual deformed.

Man's spiritual condition has been likened to that of a person who received a lethal injection from a tainted blood transfusion. As a result he carries in his body a deadly disease. And when Adam and Eve sinned, they became guilty. They didn't change physically. I think that the appearance of Adam and Eve, the moment before their sin, and the moment after, was the same. They appeared the same, but they had changed significantly spiritually. They were separated from God. They lost their innocence and purity. They were guilty for the first time and corrupt in their thoughts and desires. And we have all inherited that condition of guilt and corruption. That's original sin. We inherited that from Adam. The rivers and streams and rivulets of humanity have all been polluted at the source.

That is the meaning of Paul's summary that mankind, both Jew and Greeks, are all under sin. We're not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners. We are born with a nature that is enslaved to sin.

Now that is not a statement that is heard very often today. At least, I don't think that it is. And when it is heard, I don't think that it is well-received. People don't like to think of themselves as sinners. Most people would admit that they're not perfect, that they make

mistakes and they do things that are not right, but they would not confess to being sinners or being sinful.

Most would probably say that man is basically good and is improving. The most pessimistic might say that man is bad, maybe even basically bad, but that he can improve. He's like a sick man who needs medicine, and with the right treatment, there is hope for improvement.

But the Bible gives a very different report. Man is not good. Man is not healthy. Man is not even sick. Man is dead. Self-improvement is impossible. What man needs is a resurrection. Death is the consequence of sin. Paul will state that explicitly later on in the book. But we see that from the very beginning of the Bible. God told Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and even, and he said that he ate of it, he would surely die.

He ate and he died. He was instantly separated from God. Spiritually he died. Physically he did not die immediately. He lived hundreds of years following that, but at that very instant, the seeds of his physical death were sown and they eventually came to fruition. That's the consequence of death and that has been passed on to all of Adam's posterity. Now all mankind is under sin - guilty of sin and controlled by sin. That is Paul's summary of man's condition.

And his judgment here was no popular in his day than it is in our day. So Paul doesn't leave this with simply that verdict that he has given. He does not simply pronounce man's condition then move on. He gives some support for what he has to say. He's already given a great deal of support. If we read through chapter 1 and then chapter 2 again, we see the condemning evidence all along the way and we can look around at what we see in the world today, as I've already said, and we see much evidence for this very point.

But Paul now appeals to the highest authority. He appeals to scripture. That is the final authority for all that we do and all that we say and all that we think. It's what does the word of God say? And here Paul supports this verdict that he has given by giving a series of

seven Old Testament texts that prove his statement that verify his verdict. Together they demonstrate three facts about sin and the human race.

In verses 10-12, Paul shows the comprehensiveness of sin, the universality of sin; in verse 13-18, the pervasiveness of sin. And all through these texts, he shows the wickedness of sin. His method is very similar to that which is practiced by the rabbis who would put passages like a string of pearls. And together this string of pearls, this group of texts that Paul cites, gives a devastating witness against the whole human race.

I think they call for very little comment. It really would be enough to simply read them, and I feel like I'm explaining the obvious in going through them with some exposition. They are clear verses. But having said that, the fact is they are very difficult verses for people to accept.

Well, Paul begins with Psalm 14, verses 1-3 and perhaps Ecclesiastes 7:20 to show that sin is universal. "There is none righteous," he says. Now, Paul is quoting David. So this is the witness of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. This is the witness of the entire Bible. The human race does not meet God's standard of acceptance, which is righteousness, which is absolute purity.

And whatever does not meet that standard, does not conform to that standard, that is sin, which has been defined very ably, very clearly, by the Westminster Shorter Catechism. "Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God." That breaks down sin in definition in two ways:

On the one hand, it is not doing what should be done. It is neglecting our duties, neglecting our responsibility. On the other hand, it is doing what we should not do. It is violating God's commands. Sin is lawlessness. John defines it very simply as that in 1 John 3. Sin is lawlessness. And the conclusion that Paul makes here is that all mankind is lawless.

Now, that seems like a very strict statement, maybe a very statement. Surely we might think there are some exceptions to that, and as we think about it, good people come to mind, maybe a loving grandfather or a kindly uncle, a revered statesman. Surely there have to be exceptions to that statement. But Paul leaves no room for exception. To the statement "There is none righteous," he adds, "not even one."

So if there's not one, then there must be none. Quite a condemnation. It is a kind of summary statement. In the next verses, Paul is more specific and particularizes the ways in which universal sinfulness appears. It appears in the mind. It affects the way people think. It affects what they understand. People not only lack righteousness, they lack understanding. No one understands, he says.

Well, we might ask, "Do not understand what?" Because men understand a lot. There are brilliant scientists and philosophers. There are today; there have been down through history. There are men and women who have great knowledge of literature and history. In addition to that, we have computers today that generate information at high speeds that are continually adding information to our knowledge of the universe. This is an age of information. This is an age of understanding. This is an age, is it not, of great knowledge, advancement in knowledge?

And yet Paul writes there is none who understands. Well, obviously he doesn't mean none who understands technology, but none understands theology. Men have no true understanding of the nature of God and don't even seek to know Him. There is none who seeks for God, he says.

Now, the world would reject that statement root and branch. Many seek for God, don't they? I mean, walk into a bookstore today, a Borders bookstore or a Barnes & Noble, and you find a whole section on religion, on spirituality, eastern mysticism, all kinds of religion. And there is lots of religion today. In fact, from the very beginning there has been religion. The world is a very religion place.

Go back to the very beginning of the Bible. Chapter 4, we see those two brothers. They're very religious - Cain and Abel. Cain was a religious zealot. He killed because of religion. Men are very religious. But do they seek God? Do they seek the triune God who is holy and just, who is described as a consuming fire?

No, they hate that God. Do they acknowledge that the God of the Bible is the creator of all things? Do they recognize Him as the absolute sovereign Lord of the universe? Do they seek Him? No, they hate that God.

Do they recognize Jesus Christ as God's eternal Son who brought the universe into being? Do they recognize Him as the Savior of the world that He created? Do they seek to know Him? No, they crucified Him. But that is the God that no one seeks, not naturally, which is a statement that many in the church today would question.

Kent Hughes, who is the minister of the minister of the College Church in Wheaton, Illinois, wrote, "This is a verse which many Christians simply do not believe." That's true. You hear it in the way people speak and the way they refer to things. They talk of finding Christ as though He's out there waiting for us to seek Him or discover Him. They speak of seeker services, as though there are all these people coming who want to know about God and are very interested in Him and the Lord is waiting for them, just hoping that they'll come and find Him.

As though the first step in salvation is man's step, which begins perhaps with a longing for God, and then, of course, comes to fruition with faith in the Lord and then the Lord blesses that in response to that faith, that He is who one who responds to us. Maybe they do accept an idea of prevenient grace, of grace that goes before of God helping us out, but basically what it comes down to is man takes the initiative and God responds to man.

That is not what Paul says. "None seek." Jesus said it as well. Listen to what He said, recorded in John 6:44. "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws Him." Did you hear that?

"No one can come." He did not say no one will come. That's true. But He goes to something more basic than that. "No one can," no one is able, "to come, unless the Father who sent Me draws Him."

John wrote in 1 John 4:10 and then 19, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us." How do you know love? You know it by God and the way He loved the unloving and the unlovable. He sent His Son into the world when the world was in rebellion. He sent Him to die for sinners, for the unrighteousness, for those in rebellion against Him. That's love. And John goes on in verse 19 to say, "We love because He first loved us." God takes the initiative, always. None of us seeks God unless He first seeks us, and fortunately He does. Out of His grace He seeks a lot of us and He finds us, and people believe.

But man, by his nature, never seeks God. He seeks other gods, gods of his own making. He develops religion and lots of religion, but not according to scripture. In fact, universally, man is in rebellion against God, actively pursuing unrighteousness. Verse 12, "All have turned aside." Turned aside from the truth.

This is the apostasy that Paul spoke of in 1:21. "Even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks." That's willful rejection of the truth, and in that text Paul's referring to the Gentile. They had the revelation of God in nature, a clear revelation that God is, that they are a creature, they are creatures, that He is the sovereign, and yet they deliberately, willfully, knowingly rejected that, turned away from it. But this also applies to the Jew, because the Jew had the special revelation of God, had the promises of the Messiah to come, clear prophecies about His coming and rejected that.

So here Paul moves from man's character to his conduct. It follows from what has already been said, because man's mind and thoughts are affected by sin, his actions are affected. There is none who does good. not good, according to God's standard; not good before God. Before man, well, we do good things.

We praise one another for the altruism of an individual or the goodness of another individual. But before God, Paul says, there is none who does good. And once again Paul closes all loopholes by adding, "There is not even one."

In the following verses, verses 13-17, Paul becomes more specific in his charges by describing sin's connection with parts of the body, which indicates the pervasiveness of sin. It is comprehensive. It is universal. All are sinful. And it is pervasive. It has touched every aspect of our constitution - the mind and the body, the thoughts and the actions, all of it is affected by sin.

Verses 13 and 14, Paul describes the sinfulness of man's speech. "Their throat is an open grave/With their tongues they keep deceiving,"/"The poison of asps is under their lips";/"Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness."

It's a vivid description, this description of the throat as a grave and probably has broad implications. It could indicate the deadly and destructive effects of speech. Or perhaps it speaks of the corruption of the heart that is expressed in speech. But either way, it's an indictment on the speech of men and women, the way we talk, the things that come out of our heart through our throats, through our mouths. It's like an open grave.

And we find this kinds of descriptions, the exposition of the evilness of the tongue, all through the Bible. In the Proverbs, for example, the adulteress is described as a flatterer. The lips of an adulteress drip honey and smoother than oil is her speech. She seduces men with flattering lips and leads them on to their deaths. Deception occurs through flattery. Lips that are lined, words that are wicked are powerful instruments of destruction.

Now, what the author is saying is that it's pervasive. It's throughout the human race. This is the common experience, this kind of speech, speech that's provocative in various ways. Through speech men have sent armies and nations to war. And so the next description of man's condition is that of violence. It follows quite naturally from

what he said about the tongue, about the lips, about the way men speak. Verse 15, "Their feet are swift to shed blood/Destruction and misery are in their paths/And the path of peace they have not known."

The wicked are not at peace. They are not at peace with God. The wicked are not at peace with men. And they're not at peace within themselves. Isaiah describes the wicked as being like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet and its waters toss up refuse and mud. "There is no peace as my God for the wicked." And so they fight and destroy one another.

The Scottish commentator, Robert Haldane, wrote, "The most savage animals do not destroy so many of their own species to appease their hunger as man destroys of his fellows to satiate his ambition, revenge, or cupidity." And so wherever men go, they leave behind them a trail of destruction and misery. That is the story of human history, because man is fallen. Man's heart is sinful.

In the 18th century, the French general Marechal de Saxe wrote, "The human heart is the starting point of all matters pertaining to war." That's insightful. That's insightful for a general. He recognized nature of man is bent toward that. The heart is the place of origin for all fighting, for all wars. The heart of man moves the parts of the body to do the evil things that it does. It moves the parts of the body to deceive and steal, to murder, and make war.

And that's the point of verse 18, which gives us the source of all of this. It goes to the root of evil. Paul writes, "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Now, that's a figurative way of describing the truth that he puts forth there. The eyes direct a person's steps. And so this is a way of saying that God has no part in directing their lives. When it comes to the decisions of life, when it comes to charting one's course in life, God doesn't figure into that. Men leave God out of all of that so that they are, as Charles Cranfield stated, practical if not theoretical atheists. And all of this shows the wickedness of sin. All through this we see that.

Man was not made for these things. Man was made to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. God made man innocent. He made him perfect. He placed him in a perfect environment, and the command that He gave to him was to cultivate the garden and be fruitful and multiple.

Man was to be a fruitful, prosperous, productive individual, doing that which is good, doing that which is edifying, bringing glory to God in his or her actions. But sin has deformed God's creation, so that instead of using his limbs and organs as instruments of good, they are turned into weapons of wickedness.

We can sum up these verses by saying that the verdict of scripture on mankind is one of universal and total depravity. That is the consequence of original sin. That is a doctrine that is clearly taught in the Bible, but it's often misunderstood in its meaning. Total depravity does not mean that all men are as bad as they could possibly be. What it means is that our corruption due to sin is total, not in degree, but in extent. Sin has affected every part of our being, so it is total. The depravity is total in that no part of our being has been untouched by sin.

Everything that we are and everything that we do has been tainted. It is spoiled. That is true, even of us as Christians. I don't know who it was who made this statement. I've quoted it before and I've heard different sources. It's a good statement, but some say it was the Scott Robert Murray M'Cheyne, others that it was the English evangelist George Whitefield who said in his prayer, "I even repent of the tears of my repentance." In other words, there's no good thing in me. Even my repentance is not perfect. I think that's a true statement. And if that is a true statement about the repentant, what about the unrepentant?

And so no one does a completely good work. The best that we do is not as good as it should be, and not meritorious with God. We cannot earn His favor. We cannot save ourselves. As J.I. Packer has written, "Total depravity entails total inability. That is, the state of

not having it in ourselves to respond to God and His word in a sincere and wholehearted way."

It doesn't mean that people want to seek God, want to find God, want to believe, but can't. It means they can't want to, so they don't. They don't seek Him. Their hearts are turned away from God. They have no interest in Him, no understanding of Him. Only by grace, by the effectual work of the Holy Spirit, can the hearts of men and women be changed and given a desire to seek the Lord and made willing to believe. So all of grace, salvation is all of the Lord, but left to himself, man is unable to save himself. Man is guilty of sin and unwilling to change, unable to come to God. That's the condition of the whole human race. It is a race in ruins.

Now, Paul comes to the end of this first main section of the book of Romans and draws the conclusion from the witness of the Old Testament that all mankind without exception is condemned by God, verse 19. "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God."

The Law - and here it means the entire Old Testament scripture - that's evident from the verses that he's quoted, which are mainly the Psalms and text from Isaiah - but all of the Old Testament was given to Israel and it was given for the instruction of the Jews so that they would know that they are not innocent, that they are condemned as sinners, so that they would seek the Messiah who was promised to them.

But of course if the Jews, God's covenant people, the nation that is blessed above all nations, if they are sinners, then of course the whole human race is also condemned. And that is the purpose of the Law. The purpose of the Law is to show people their guilt and close every mouth, put to silence every excuse, every argument that one might raise to justify himself or herself.

Calvin likened this verse to a defendant in court who is given the opportunity to speak in his own defense but is speechless because

of the weight of the evidence against him. Instead of standing and making a defense, instead of opening his mouth, he sits silent, waiting for the pronouncement of his sentence and the execution, has nothing to say. His guilt is obvious. And that is the purpose of the Law, and this is the point to which Paul has been moving in this portion of the book, from chapter 1:18 to the present.

He's been demonstrating this is the case and to shut everyone's mouth, Jew and Gentile alike. The Gentiles are idolaters, immoral people. They are guilty. And the judgmental Jews are just as guilty. Their privileges, those of the Jews and their special status, do not exempt them from judgment. And so if they're not exempt, with all the privileges and the advantages that they had, then those without those advantages are certainly not exempt. The whole world without exception is without excuse and condemned.

All know something about God. Gentiles received revelation from nature. The Jewish people received revelation in scripture - general and special revelation. Everyone has some of that. And all know something about morality, but all have rejected the revelation that they received and they have gone their own way. They have broken the law and that is the basis of their guilt and condemnation. That's what Paul says. That's what he writes in verse 20. "Because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in his sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."

No one can do the works of the Law, not perfectly. The Law demands perfection. If we're gonna live by the Law then we must do it completely perfectly, because it demands complete compliance and no one can do that. No one can give that.

And so the Law does not justify, does not save. It only condemns, and that is its function. That's why it was given. It is like a mirror. A mirror shows us the spots on our face. It shows us the dirt that needs to be removed. But a mirror can't remove it. It reveals the condition so that we will turn from the mirror to the soap and the water. And that is what the Law was given to do, for through the Law

comes the knowledge of sin, Paul writes. But not the removal of sin. In other words, no one can be saved by his or her good works. It is impossible.

In his commentary on the book of Galatians, Luther wrote about the purpose of the Law. It is "to make men not better, but worse; to show unto them their sin, that by the knowledge thereof they may be humbled, terrified, bruised and broken. And by this means may be driven to seek grace and so come to the blessed seed, come to Jesus Christ."

People need that, because by nature we tend to excuse ourselves. We tend to take our failures lightly and ignore God. In fact, for most people, I think it's probably accurate to say that if God ever comes to mind, it is not as a judge. And if they see Him as any kind of judge, He's not a severe judge, he's not a strict judge, and He'll let these things go by. He'll treat us the way we tend to treat one another.

Well, the 11th century theologian Anselm had a God response to that kind of thinking. In his book on the work of Christ he warned those who thought that God would overlook their sins if they would simply do their best, if they'd live life as best as they could. He said, "You have not yet considered how great your sin is." And that's really the problem. People do not take sin seriously. They do not think it's all that great a problem and do not believe in its consequences.

But the Law comes along like a mirror and shows us what we are really like. People that they are fully clothed, like that emperor in the story, but the Law comes along and exposes our nakedness. It shows that all are without excuse. If anything is clear, it is that. If anything is clear in the world, it is that man is a sinner. His condition is one of total depravity. It is one of total inability and people need to know that.

I say that, because one might respond to that statement of total inability, "Why say that? That will just remove all incentive to do anything. If you think that you're unable, if what you're saying is I can't do anything to remedy my situation, I'm unable, well, I'll give

up. That takes away all incentive." Well, in a sense that's good, because if you think you can do something, you'll try to do something. If you think if it's within you to save yourself and change yourself, then you'll seek those remedies.

But if someone comes along as a physician, say, and says to you, "I can't do anything for you and you can't do anything for yourself. Your condition is that grave, but I do know someone who can help," you'll go to that person. And that's the purpose of all of this. It is to show you cannot help yourself or save yourself, but there is a great physician who can. We are helpless in and of ourselves, and that should cause us to turn to the one who can help, the one who can change us, the Lord God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In his sermon on this text, James Boice quoted a verse by the English poet Robert Herrick, who was a contemporary of William Shakespeare. It is about God cleansing him. It is about God taking away his sin and his inability to do it himself. And to express that, he uses the imagery of Greek myth about Hercules and the performance of one of his so-called impossible tasks. It was the task of cleaning out the filthy stables of King Augeas. He wrote, "Lord, I confess that thou alone aren't able to purify this Augean stable. Be the seas, water, and the lands all soap, yet if I blood not wash me, there's no hope."

Well, our heart is like that Augean stable. It's full of filth and it's so great that we cannot clean it ourselves. We are by nature unrighteousness people. We don't do good. We don't seek God, not in of ourselves, but God does not leave us to ourselves, and He has done what we cannot do for ourselves. An eternity past, He elected an innumerable multitude from all the nations. In the fullness of time He sent His Son to die for them. And in each generation the Spirit of God moves throughout the world, applying the merits of the cross to God's elect ones.

And as a result, they do seek. They do come. They do believe and they are saved. Have you come? Have you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you know that you are saved? Do you know that you

are a sinner, that you are condemned in and of yourself? That's the first step. The verdict of scripture is that there is none righteous, not even one. That includes you, that includes me, that includes all of us.

But the solution of scripture is the righteousness of God that is received as a free gift through faith alone. It is the righteousness of God, which God gives to all who believe in Him who died in our place, who bore the penalty of our sins as our substitute. All who look to Him, all who trust in Him, will be saved. In fact, they are saved eternally at the moment of faith. So if you're here without Christ, look to Him. Trust in Him. What you cannot do for yourself, He has done and He will do for you when you believe. May God help you to do that and help each of us to rejoice in what He has done for us, and honor Him in all that we do. Now that we are saved, we can do good, by God's grace. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness. You have been good to us in many, many ways. The day will come when even the unbeliever must confess with his knee bowed before You, bowed before the great king, the Lord Jesus Christ, that You have done good to his or her.

You've blessed this world abundantly, but no greater blessing has been given than the blessing of eternal life, which You've purchased for Your people through the death of Your Son. We thank You for that and thank You that You have made us, by Your grace, Your people, children and heirs. What a blessing and what a privilege, Father. We thank You for that and we pray these things in Christ name. Amen.