



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 3: 22-23

Romans

"The Gift of Righteousness"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] It's good to be back, and to be back in the Book of Romans. And we do enter into a new section of the book. As the bulletin states, it is Romans chapter 3 verses 21 through 23. This is only part of a section that we'll be covering in the next couple of weeks. But the new section, we emerge from the indictment that Paul has brought upon the human race, and now we have hope. We have the message of the gospel. The text this morning, as I said, is Romans chapter 3 verses 21 through 23. So follow along with me as I read.

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

May God bless this reading of His word. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for this time together this morning when we can again, open our Bibles and look into the text of Scripture that You have given to us in the Book of Romans, and we come to this magnificent portion of that book in which Paul gives us the hope that has been lacking in the previous passages. We have read and considered and pondered over the past weeks the condition of mankind, the desperate state that man is in by nature, that he is lost, he is ruined. Left to himself, there's no hope. And yet, this book is about Your grace, and it is the message of the good news, that we are not left to ourselves, that what we cannot do for ourselves,

You have done in our stead. You have sent Your Son into the world to die for sinners, and that He has redeemed His people and satisfied Your justice. He has joined us to Himself and made us Your people. So, we praise You for that, Father, because as we consider these things, we see very clearly that this is not of us at all. It is all of You. Salvation is of the Lord, from beginning to end. And so, our time this morning, Father, should lead us into a sense of praise and thanksgiving, a sense of deep gratitude that should have a profound effect on the way we think and the way we live. May that be the result of our time together. Bless us. Sanctify us. Give us understanding of Your work of salvation, the work that has been done for us personally, and give us a sense of gratitude, that we should have, that should affect our thinking and our conduct.

So bless us spiritually. Build us up in the faith, and bless us in many other ways, Father. Bless us in the material things of life as they are needed, and as it is profitable for us. You have blessed us abundantly, Father. You give us more than we really understand, even when we are deprived of things, whether it be health or possessions. That comes from the hand of an all-wise God, and it's for our own good. We don't often see it that way, but we know by faith that that is the case, that when we are deprived, and when we go through periods of difficulty, through dark passages in this world, that they are not passages we go through alone. They may feel alone, but we're not alone. You guide us through them, and You have a good purpose for everything that comes into our life. Deprivation has a good, a sanctifying purpose in the life of Your children, and we thank You for that. We praise You for that, and praise You for the abundance of things that You do give. We are wealthy people, and we give You the thanks for that, and pray that the things of this world will not become so attractive to us that they steal our hearts and cause us to grow cold, or worse yet, lukewarm, indifferent toward what is important toward life in You, life in Your Son.

So, Father, we pray for ourselves in that way. We pray for ourselves spiritually and materially. We thank You for what You've given us. We thank You for what You've taken from us. We thank You for the lives You've given us. Bless us in many ways. We pray for our Young people. We know that many of them are graduating from high school at this time, and some have graduated from college, and they move on to a new stage in life. We pray that You'd bless them as they do so. Give them wisdom. give them perspective that will enable them to live life wisely, to

undertake the tasks that have been given to them in a way that brings honor to You and has reward for them. Bless those who are sick and those who are in need of our prayers. We pray that You'd give healing and encouragement. We pray for those on this weekend who are traveling. We pray that You'd give them safety. We pray that You'd bless our meetings that follow this hour. We pray for the Sunday school classes, that You'd bless them. Bless the teachers. We thank You for their work. We pray that You'd open hearts to receive their instruction, and that You'd build up Your people, Young and old alike, this morning. In this hour and the hour to come, and we pray that for the evening meeting as we meet again to remember our Lord and what He's done for us. Father, fill us with love for Him. Take away the love we may have for the things of the world and fill us with love for Jesus Christ, that we might serve Him faithfully. Bless us to that end now as we study this great text of Scripture. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] In a time of great distress, Job asked what has been called the basic religious question. How can a man be just before God? That is the fundamental question of religion and of life. There is no more important question than that, and it comes before us very naturally at this point in the Book of Romans. Paul has just finished bringing a sweeping indictment against mankind. Everyone, without exception, is lost in ruin by sin. No one is righteous. All lack a right standing before God. From chapter 1 verse 18 through chapter 3 and verse 20, Paul has described mankind's predicament. He has demonstrated that all human beings, Jews and Gentiles alike, are in outright rebellion against God. It's not a problem of lacking religion. It's a matter of lacking righteousness. Man is religious from the very beginning. Man has been very religious. You go throughout the world and you see the evidence of that. Everywhere, there are signs of religion. Colossal buildings and the forms of worship that various people show. Man has never lacked religion, but his religion is universally a failure. Cannot produce righteousness. In fact, it results in just the opposite. The Gentiles were people of worship. They still are. But they worshipped, as Paul said, animals and idols. The Jews contradicted the very law that they boasted in. The Gentiles are depraved. The Jews are hypocrites. Neither side of humanity has achieved righteousness by its religion and its best efforts. All are naked. All are guilty before God.

The problem is not just with the fruit. It's with the root. It is the problem of original sin. Man is corrupt. He is in a terrible predicament. That is Paul's message in these first three chapters of the book. And when we feel the force of his words in this lengthy charge of guilt, we feel the force of Job's searching question: how can a man be just before God?

Not by religion. Not by the law. Paul's last statement was: by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified. It is a very despairing end for the first three chapters of the Book of Romans. In fact, if the Book of Romans were a road, a way of self-salvation, it would end here, leaving us stripped of everything, every pretense of goodness and righteousness, and standing before a vast, deep, impassable gulf, leaving us hopeless and helpless, if the Book of Romans ended here. Then, we read the next verse, and suddenly, the first two words give hope. But now, we cannot save ourselves, but God Himself has intervened to save us. This portion of the book, these words, have been called one of the great adversities of the Bible. And as you read through the New Testament, you discover a lot of these great contrasts and transitions. Here, we have but now, and it leads into a magnificent portion of the Book of Romans. But turn to other portions of Bible, you have that same kind of contrast in John chapter 9 and verse 25 when the blind man was healed by Jesus. His testimony is: one thing I know. I was once was blind, but now I see. Ephesians chapter 2 verses 1 through 5 can be condensed: you were dead in your trespasses in sins. But God, being rich in mercy, made us alive. First Corinthians 15 verses 19 and 20. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied. But now, Christ has been raised from the dead.

Great contrasts in the human condition between blindness in sight, between death and life, between despair and hope. It's what we have here. A great contrast, a tremendous transition in the book. By the works of the law, no flesh will be justified. But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been manifested. Righteousness of God. This is the expression that we were introduced to back at the very beginning in chapter 1 and verse 17 where we had set forth a real theme of this book. And now, Paul returns to it. The righteousness of God. It is the expression that Luther had such a struggle over as an Augustinian monk. He thought that it meant the attribute of God's righteousness, what God required of us, what we had to produce in order to gain His acceptance. And so he tried very hard to do that, to

produce a righteousness that would be acceptable by God and he engaged in all kinds of religious activities, in prayers and fasting, and vigils and good works. But the more he tried, the farther behind he fell. He just couldn't gain God's approval.

Luther was on my mind this past week. I was in Rome and I went to the Schola Sancta, which is across from the Basilica, or the church of St. John Lateran. And there, I watched these pilgrims from all over the world press into this relatively small building and immediately hit their knees on these steps and begin to crawl up the steps, kissing each one, praying at each one. I thought of Luther doing that so many of hundred years ago. And the experience that he had, because it was transforming in his life. He'd been studying this text but had not come to an understanding of it, and he'd gone to Rome to gain some peace, some order in his spiritual life, and he went through all of the spiritual exercises that Rome advised. And as he was crawling up those steps, you remember, at each step, he kept hearing the words of Habakkuk, which Paul quotes in chapter 1 and verse 17: the just shall live by faith. The just shall live by faith.

He finally came to realize that the righteousness of God, not something that we do for God, but something God does for us. It is the righteousness of Christ received by faith. When Luther understood that, this righteousness that had filled him with such great frustration. In fact, he said, filled him with hate for God. It filled him with love for the Lord, and it became for him what he called "a gate to heaven." It's what it is. The gift of God's righteousness is the gate to heaven. It's how we get there. It is what Paul calls the gift of righteousness in Romans 5:17. It is the status of righteousness before God, given by God, and it is the key to this passage of Romans chapter 3 verses 21 through 26. It reappears here in the book as someone has said, like the son that rises after a long dark night. To give the answer to Job's question of how we can be right with God. We can't be right in our own efforts and by our own works of righteousness, but we can be right because of God. He makes us right. He gives us that status that's standing before Him. He has taken the initiative to give sinners righteousness in His sight. That's the gospel. That's the good news of salvation, and Paul now explains it in chapter 3 verses 21 through 26.

The importance of this passage cannot be overstated or overestimated. Professor Charles Cranfield in his commentary on the Book of Romans calls it the "center and heart," or the main portion of the Book of Romans. And Dr. Leon Morris

suggests that it may possibly be the most important single paragraph ever written. It contains three important words: righteousness, redemption, and propitiation. Each word explains what God has done in order to obtain salvation for us. In fact, we can't understand the gospel, we cannot understand the cross of Jesus Christ unless we understand these three words. Propitiation is appeasing God. It refers to satisfying His justice towards sinners and turning away His wrath. There is no salvation unless God's righteous anger is averted, His just wrath is turned away. There's no salvation unless that happens.

Well, that happened at the cross when God poured out His wrath on His Son as our substitute so that the penalty of sin was met, the wrath of God was exhausted, and His justice was fully satisfied. That's propitiation, and in that way, Christ redeemed us, meaning He bought us. Redemption describes our rescue out of the captivity of sin at the price of Christ's own blood. He purchased us out of sin. He purchased us out of the wrath of God. He purchased us out of captivity. And when He satisfied God's justice and bought us for Himself, He obtained for us righteousness which is given as a gift when we believe at that very moment.

Now, because these words are so important, we are going to consider them carefully. And to do that, we're going to look at this passage in two parts, focusing first on righteousness. It is a gift. It is what God gives in the act of justification which is God's act of declaring a sinner to be right, to be righteous at the moment of faith. It does not mean that He declares bad people to be good. It does not mean that He is saying that we are not sinners after all. In justification, God pronounces believers legally righteous from any liability of the broken law because He Himself, in His Son, has born the penalty of their law-breaking in their place. J.I. Packer defines justification as God's gracious work of bestowing upon guilty sinners a justified justification. In other words, it's a just act. It's a righteous act on His part, acquitting them in the court of heaven without prejudice to His justice as their judge. In other words, God treats the sinner who believes as though he or she were not a sinner, as though we were perfect. Not because of anything on us, and not because it's just His will to do so, but because He has punished our sins in our substitute. He has dealt with it in another, and done so fully and effectively. So, the gift of righteousness with which God clothes us was obtained by God at a great price, that of His Son, His

life, His death. But it's free to the believer, and Paul makes that clear from the beginning of this great contrast.

No one will be justified by the works of the law, but now, apart from the law, the righteousness of law has been manifested. It is righteousness that is apart from the law. It's not contrary to the law because Paul also states that it was witnessed by the law in the prophets. But it is apart from the law in that it is not a righteousness that we can produce by our works, by our efforts to keep the law. We cannot do that. That's impossible. The law makes no contribution to our justification. It doesn't prepare us for our justification, at least not in the sense that by keeping the law, we can become good enough to where God begins to be gracious to us, or God shows His grace by justifying us. It does prepare us in the sense that it shows us how much we lack and how far short we fall. But, the doing of the law cannot in any way prepare us in the sense of gaining some merit for us with God. It does not sustain us in God's grace or God's righteousness. And Paul makes that plain in the statement: apart from the law. He lays a lot of stress on that by putting the emphasis on it in the position in which he places this in the sentence. It's the very beginning of the verse. He wants us to see this very clearly. The righteousness that he's going to speak about now is apart from the law. The law, as I said, exposes our lack of righteousness, but it does not provide us with righteousness. It cannot do that. The letter of the law has no power in itself. It can only show us our need of power. It can only show us our need of righteousness. And that was the reason that the law was given, to show men their lack of righteousness, their inability to achieve righteousness, the inability to obtain God's acceptance, and their need of God's gift of that righteousness and acceptance, which is obtained by Christ and Christ alone.

The whole of the Old Testament gives witness to that in its prophecies and its foreshadowings and its various types. So everything Paul writes here is consistent with the law and the prophets, which means the whole of the Old Testament Scriptures. He's not introducing some new teaching. He's not introducing some novel idea. It was no surprise, I'm sure, as a new convert, as he began to reflect over the Word of God, that he who knew so much of the Word of God as a Pharisee had not seen these things so clearly. There's nothing new or novel in what Paul is saying. From beginning to the end of the Old Testament, we have the promise given and

developed of a redeemer to come, who would do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Go back to the beginning, to Genesis chapter 3 and verse 15 and we have the first gospel given. The first statement of it. Adam and Even had sinned. They were guilty. They were naked and their instinctive response was to run, to hide from God's sight. But He found them out. He always does. We can never escape from Him. We can never hide, so that He has to seek us out. He knows where we are at all times. He knows everything about us, and He found them out, and He pronounced judgment on them, and He cursed the serpent. But in that curse on the serpent, He gave a word of hope and salvation to the sinners. He said, "I will put enmity between you," that is between the serpent, "and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He shall bruise you on the head and you shall bruise him on the heel." The seed of the woman, the descendent of Eve is Christ. Satan would strike Him on the heel at the cross. But just as a wound on the heel is not fatal, the cross would not be permanently fatal. The Lord would rise from the dead. And by means of the cross, through His death, He would crush Satan's head. He would cause a fatal blow to him which would destroy him and his works and would deliver God's people from his domain and his influence.

That was the gospel for Adam and Even to believe and hope in, a redeemer to come. Then before driving them out of paradise, the Lord did an amazing thing. He slew two animals and clothed the man and the woman with their skins, the skins of these slain animals. It must've been a shocking sight. You can just imagine that. These two people, Adam and Eve had never seen death. They'd never seen bloodshed, certainly not like this. This was violent bloodshed. Took these two animals and suddenly slew them and then stripped them of their skin and clothed this couple with that skin, the skins of these animals. It must've been a shocking sight. But in that slaughter, they saw a number of things. They saw the consequence of what they had done. But their sin had an effect not only on themselves, but the whole creation. Something terrible had happened.

But in that, they had also witnessed what would happen to that promised redeemer and what He would do. By His death, He would take away our nakedness and our shame. He would remove our sin. He would clothe us with His own righteousness which He won for us at the cross. As the Bible unfolds, God adds more revelation to the promise. He calls Abraham out of paganism and He promised him

that all of the nations would be blessed through Him. Abraham believed the Lord and the Lord blessed him with righteousness, by faith apart from the law. There's hundreds of years before the law had ever been given. Through faith, he had righteousness. And when the Lord tested his faith in Genesis 22 by telling him to offer up his only son, Isaac, whom he loved, something more about the redeemer was revealed. The Lord prevented the sacrifice, but He, in doing so, reaffirmed the promise to Abraham in Genesis 22 and verse 18 that the nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's seed. That's the seed of the woman that's promised in Genesis 3:15. It's the Lord Jesus Christ. And what Abraham learns there, specifically what we learn there: it's not Abraham that's going to be the blessing. He's not going to be the one that blesses the nation; it will be his descendent that will be the one that blesses the nations. And the offering of Isaac gave us a picture, gave him a picture of how that blessing would happen: through the sacrifice of God's only begotten Son, the one whom He loves.

And all through the Old Testament, there are sacrifices. Sacrifice was at the center of worship and very significant. In Leviticus chapter 17 and verse 11, we have an explanation of the significance of sacrifice. This is what it's about. He says, "It is the blood that makes atonement." Life is in the blood, and when that blood is poured out, that life ends. It is by the ending of life, by the death of the substitute that there's forgiveness of sin, and only in that way.

What was pictured in lambs, and goats, and bulls that were slain would be fulfilled in a man revealed more fully in Isaiah chapters 52 and 53, the suffering servant. And there, in verse 11 of Isaiah 53, as the Lord said of the servant, as a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it. He will see the work that He accomplished, the people that He redeemed, and be satisfied. He'll see that His work was an accomplishment. Not a provision, but an accomplishment. Justice will be met. Then He adds: My servant will justify the many as He will bear their iniquities. He will declare them righteous with the Lord's death accomplished.

Isaiah 45 verse 24. They will say of Me, only in the Lord are righteous and strength. Only in the Lord. Not in the law. Not in our best efforts. Only in the Lord are righteousness and strength. There are many other passages that we could study in the psalms and the prophets about the Old Testament. But clearly what Paul taught was not a novelty. It's not some new idea. It's a further development of the old

doctrines and teachings of the Word of God from the very beginning. The righteousness of God that is necessary for salvation is apart from the law. It is in the Lord. It is the gift of God's grace. That was the teaching of the Old Testament. And in verse 22, Paul defines the righteousness that he's speaking of more precisely. It is through faith in Jesus Christ, and it is for all who believe. Paul wants to make it very clear that God's righteousness is a gift. Cannot be earned, cannot be achieved through the works of the law. He makes an emphasis of that by placing at the very beginning of verse 21. It is through faith and it is for believers, he says here at verse 22, to emphasize that this is something that is received through faith and faith alone. It's very similar, this statement in verse 22, to what Paul wrote back at the beginning in verse 17 of chapter 1. The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, which is an intensive way of saying: by faith alone, from start to finish, it's by faith. So that is the kind of righteousness that Paul has in mind. Not a works righteousness, but a faith righteousness, the gift of righteousness.

As Paul wrote in 1:17, going back to the Old Testament, grounding everything that he has to say in the prophets and the Word of God, Habakkuk, the righteous man shall live by faith, or the just shall live by faith. It's all of faith.

So, since the righteous man shall live by faith, this is a matter of life and death. There is no more important issue than this issue we are studying. This is a matter of eternal importance. Salvation, life, eternal life. It is by faith alone. But, faith is not enough. Faith always has an object. And here for the first time in the Book of Romans, Paul identifies the object of saving faith. It is Jesus Christ. The faith that justifies. The faith that receives the gift of God's righteousness is not faith, generally. It's not faith in God. It's not faith in something that is sincerely believed in, and God just loves sincere faith. It is very specific faith.

General faith is something that everyone has. Whatever religion a person is a member of, he or she has faith in that religion. Faith in God is something that anyone with any sense has. Even the demons have faith in God, James tells us. What Paul is speaking of is very specific faith. It's faith in Christ. And not just Christ, but the Christ that Paul preached. And I say that because it's important for us to make this point, as important for us today as it was in Paul's day to make the point, that it is the faith in Christ that Paul preached, because there are many Jesuses that are preached today. I said that more than once, and it's not an original statement with me. It's a

very good statement and a very necessary statement, because there are all kinds of Jesuses that are preached in the world.

Rarely do you find someone who despises Jesus. There are those that do, but very rarely. Most everyone preaches something good about Jesus, and there are all kinds of Jesuses. There's the Mormon Jesus. He's not the Christ of the Bible. He's one of many gods. So there's that Jesus, and then there's the Jesus of the Jehovah's Witnesses, or the Jesus of the Christian Scientists. They all honor Him as a great person. They honor Him as an agent of God, but not as the eternal Son of God, not as very God of very God, not as the second person of the Trinity. That's how Paul has set Him forth from the outset of this book, back in chapter 1 verses 3 and 4. He is the Godman. He is descended from David, a human being, a person, but He was before David. The resurrection declared Him to be the Son of God with power. And in the next verses of our text, Paul states Christ's accomplishment. He states His accomplishment in the redemption and the propitiation that define Him our Savior, and that make Him the object of saving faith.

This is the Christ that must be believed in. Those who do believe in the Christ of the Bible receive the righteousness of God. Paul adds: there is no distinction. No distinction. Faith is always effective, and it is effective regardless of who the believing person may be, whether he or she be Jew or Gentile. There is no distinction. God doesn't discriminate. Whoever believes, regardless of the race or the education or the moral condition, whether the person is an ethical moralist or a degenerate individual, it doesn't matter. Pharisee or a prostitute, whoever that person may be, he or she is saved at the moment of faith. The believer is justified. The believer is declared righteous. We do not have to strive for a greater acceptance by God as though He gives some grace, but not enough. We must strive and work for the rest of it. We do not live. We should not live with uncertainty about our salvation if we're a believer in Jesus Christ. We don't have to wait until the end to find out what the ultimate final verdict is going to be about our soul and our salvation. For the believer, salvation is a certainty. Salvation is complete. We are fully accepted by God at the very moment of faith. And the reason is: everything has been done for us by Christ in our place. He paid the full price of sin's penalty in His death for all who believe in Him. He paid the full penalty for His elect. And His elect are those chosen by Him from the foundation of the world apart from anything in us, but they manifest

their election through faith. And at the moment of faith, they are justified. There's nothing left for the believer to pay. Nothing left for the believer to do. God gives us His righteousness.

There's no more righteousness that the believer can produce. What can we produce that Christ hasn't already given? There's nothing lacking in what He gives. You can't add anything to the righteousness of God to make it more righteous or more acceptable to Him. When Christ died, He said, "It is finished." So when we believe, what we receive is a finished, complete salvation. We can't overstate the importance of that, the practical value that this doctrine of justification has for our spiritual growth. Our salvation is forever certain. We don't need to strive to gain God's approval, to work in order to keep ourselves saved.

Now, of course, we are still sinners, and we need to understand that, and Paul develops that in chapter 7. We shouldn't be led to think that once we are declared righteous, that we're without sin, and we don't need to concern ourselves about sin. We are still sinners, and we need to struggle against sin, the sin that is in us. Paul told the Corinthians in chapter 9 and verse 27 that he disciplines his body and he makes it his slave. It's a constant work on the part of the apostle, and it is to be the case with the believer. But now, we do that not out of a sense of need in order to gain God's acceptance and gain God's approval and gain God's reward, but we do it out of a sense of gratitude to God for the gift of righteousness, what He's done for us, and with the confidence that as we strive, we do conquer. We do have victory. We're not fruitless in our efforts. That's the process of sanctification. We don't have to meet a certain standard to be approved by God. We are approved by God, and we should live every day with that sense of His acceptance and His approval and it should give us the joy and the confidence that we should have. It should give us peace.

Well, that is true for everyone who believes. There is no difference between the Jew and the Gentile in this respect. Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. And the reason there is no distinction is given in verse 23. It is that all are equally lost. The righteousness of God must come through faith or no one at all will receive it. This is what Paul argued in his long indictment in chapters 1 through 3. But he comes back to it here in verse 23 to impress on us the necessity of the gift of righteousness that's received through faith alone.

Now, he says sinned in the past tense. For all have sinned, which could refer to Adam's sin when he sinned and all the race fell with him. Paul will develop that very point in chapter 4 and verse 12. But more likely, Paul is describing everyone's cumulative past, our collective sins in this one statement. We've all sinned throughout our lives, and that's what he's stating. We're all guilty. Look over your life, consider it in its entirety, and we have sinned. We're sinners. As a result of sin, we all fall short of the glory of God. And here, Paul uses the present tense. Sinned is in the past tense, the aorist tense, and here it's the present tense, which seems to describe the abiding condition and results of sin, the continuing condition that sin has brought about in our lives. We constantly fall short of God's glory. That is the state that we are in. Outside of Christ, apart from faith in Him, mankind never at any time measures up to God's glory. This expression, the glory of God, has been taken in different ways, given different interpretations. The two most likely are either the state of glory that man was in before he fell, or the approval of God, His praise for us, His acceptance of us, His approval of us, not measuring up to His standard of righteousness, not meeting that standard.

Well, both are true. Sin has robbed man of the glory that he once possessed. Instead of standing morally and spiritually erect and free, man is by nature weighed down with sin and its corrupting influence. A couple of years ago, I was in Romania, and the room where I was staying looked out onto a busy street in Bucharest, and one morning, I was watching people walk by, and it was a cold day. It was a rainy morning, and I watched these people walking by, hurrying on to wherever they were going. And then, off a side street, I saw a woman come. She was a peasant woman. She was clothed in rags, which was not unusual in itself because there are many people like that. There were number of peasants in the streets of Bucharest. But what caught my eye was what she was carrying. She had a huge stack of cardboard on her back, and I don't know what she was doing with it. I assume she was carrying it to another place where she might get some money for what she had collected. But she looked like something out of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Clothed in rags, with a great burden on her back, just like Christian at the beginning of that book, clothed in rags with the burden of sin, and that is what man is, spiritually. That is what he is by nature. He may think that he has robes of righteousness. He may think that he stands erect. But the reality is, as God sees man, he's stooped over, he's weighed down with sin, and

he's clothed with rags. All of the original glory is gone. He was rich, but now he is poor. He's dressed in spiritual rags, weighed down by sin, and guilt. That is Paul's meaning here, or it may be. Some take it that way.

It's certainly true. But I think it's probably better to understand the falling short of God's glory is not getting God's approval due to our failure to meet His standard. That fits the context, fits so much of what He said. But the point is: universally, man falls short. Nothing that he or she does can attain to God's standard, to God's approval. We are all naturally unworthy. Now, that's not to suggest that all people are equally sinful. That is, in the manifestation of their sin. They are not. There are some people who are completely corrupt. They are thoroughly wicked, while others are moral people. They're good parents. They're good citizens. They are models in many ways. They're heroes. Before man, we may measure up or we may think we do, but the reality is: we do not stand before man. We stand before God. He is our standard and no one measures up to His standard.

Bishop Handley Moule, back in the late 1800s put it this way: "The harlot, the liar, the murderer are short of God's glory, but so are you. Perhaps they stand at the bottom of a mine, and you on the crest of an alp, but you are as little able to touch the stars as they." That's the reality. It's the stars that we have to touch, and none of us can do that. So they have to be brought down to us. That's why we need the righteousness of God, the gift of God through faith alone, apart from the works of the law. Luther learned that as a priest. He struggled and he strived. He confessed his sins and he did penitence. He said, if ever a monk got to heaven by monkery, I would've gotten there. He learned that he couldn't do that.

Paul learned the same lesson as Pharisee. He was a disciplined, dedicated man, righteous in his own eyes, righteous in the eyes of his peers. But his righteousness was far from the righteousness of Christ and what God requires. And Paul warned that on the road to Damascus when he saw Christ and realized how ragged his own righteousness really was. Told the Philippians that whatever things he had gained as a Pharisee, he considered his accomplishments, he considered his righteousness's to be rubbish, refuse. So that, he said, I may gain Christ and may be found in Him not having a righteousness of my own, derived from the law, that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.

Where does that righteousness come from? It comes from God, Paul says. We cannot produce it ourselves. We can only receive it. Have you received it, or are you still trying to produce righteousness by your own efforts? The answer to Job's question: how can a man be just before God, is through faith alone in Christ alone. So, believe in Him. Receive from Him full forgiveness and His own righteousness. Become a child of God and then live in the joy and the peace of that new relationship with God. May God help you to do that and help all of us who believe to live in that way. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness and Your grace. We come to that in this great epistle of the apostle Paul. Come to that great statement of grace, that great act of grace, justification where You impart righteousness to us. You impute it to us. Could not earn it. We cannot achieve it. We are lost if we are to accomplish salvation ourselves and produce our own righteousness. We cannot do it.