



Romans
12 The Culmination
Romans 3:21-26
Courage Church, Detroit, MI
April 7, 2019

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We have now come to the culminating passage of the incredibly loaded set of scriptures we have been wrestling our way through since January. This is the moment that will set us up for chapter 4,

which really is a continuation of the culmination...

The plan today is to look at some key elements to understand about God's relationship with Israel prior to Jesus... understanding what they were looking for in anticipation of the Messiah... the many ways that we as humans have struggled to play our role in God's plan... and how God ultimately does what He says He would do through Jesus.

Remember, we left off with Paul giving us this list of Old Testament passages that tell us why nobody is righteous... why all have sinned, and how the law is actually all the evidence against us that is needed to prove to us that we are guilty... but finally, we get to some incredible hope.

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And upon first glance, it would appear that the passage we are about to read is simply about the way that God deals with the problem of sin... and to an extent this passage is about that, but Paul does a more thorough explanation of that a little later in the letter (chapter 8).

The bigger point of THIS passage all the way to the end of chapter 4, is about how God HAS fulfilled His covenants... there is a word that Paul uses that is translated as "righteousness" which also could be translated as God's COVENANT JUSTICE... "God doing what He said He would do" - and what we see in Romans 3:21 through the end of 4 is that God in fact

HAS DONE WHAT HE SAID HE WOULD DO... but He didn't do it the way that the Jews thought that He would... He didn't do it through politics... He didn't do it through the LAW... and... HE DID IT FOR EVERYONE.

Today we will read Romans 3:21-26... and again, this part is both a culmination of everything Paul has been saying: that OUR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS was not powerful enough to STOP GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS... our unfaithfulness was not powerful enough to stop God from being faithful... its a culmination of all of that...

as well as a setup for what He is going to say hereafter as he builds ultimately to the last thing that he says in his first movement... which is that Christ was DELIVERED for our TRESPASSES (He was turned over and had to go to the cross BECAUSE OF US)... AND HE WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD for our JUSTIFICATION. (and we are going to get to that amazing conclusion right on Easter... it will be a GREAT DAY to invite your friends.)

Lets read the passage and then we can work through it a bit.

“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

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On what we call “Good Friday” - which this year is April 19, will also begin what is known as “passover” -

The last supper... the meal in which Jesus washed the feet of his disciples and they all took communion... that meal was a passover meal.

Passover is a Jewish celebration to commemorate that fateful day in Egypt when all of the first borns in every house were killed, and ONLY the families who first sacrificed a lamb, and then put the blood of the lamb on their door post, were spared of the tragedy.

Its actually fascinating, because the way that the Bible says the Jews were to wipe the blood, not over the door specifically but on both the posts around the door, what many rabbi's said that would have looked like was the Hebrew letter "chet" written in blood on these homes... which, at the time of the passover likely the language was still a pictorial one and was yet to develop to what it is now...

but the letter "chet" means LIFE... so even all the way down to the strokes used to put the blood on their door, (though they may not have known it at the time) they were declaring that there is life in this home BECAUSE OF THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB.

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The death of the firstborns was the 10th and final plague which ultimately lead to Pharaoh letting the Israelites go free from the oppression of the Egyptians whom they had been enslaved to for 430 years.

and it was only after Pharaoh absolutely refused to let the people of Israel go free, that it came to this.

In celebration of passover, Jews do something called the seder (sade - er), which means "THE ORDER" - in which they eat a meal walking through what took place those many years ago when God rescued them from the hand of the enemy, and He did it in a way that made it very clear "I am God... and these are my people."

And during the seder every year, everything happens in the EXACT SAME ORDER.

There were four different cups that you would drink from AT DIFFERENT TIMES throughout the meal, they are known as “the four cups of passover”

The symbolism behind the four cups comes from Exodus 6:6-7, which is God making a promise to Moses THAT HE WILL REMEMBER THE COVENANT THAT HE MADE WITH ABRAHAM. We will get into that covenant more over the next couple of weeks, but the passage we are looking at today really flows right from chapter 3 and goes all the way through chapter 4 which is ALL ABOUT ABRAHAM.

But in Exodus 6, Israel is still in slavery in Egypt, even though God had promised that he would give them the land of Canaan. So He says, it's time to leave Egypt.

And this is what it says:

“Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.’”

In this passage is what the sages called “the four I will’s” - and the four cups of passover represented each of these statements:

1. I will bring you out.
2. I will deliver you.
3. I will redeem you.
4. I will take you to be my people.

From these verses we get the cup of sanctification, the cup of deliverance, the cup of redemption and the cup of praise.

So you begin the meal with the cup of Sanctification or Salvation... I will rescue you... I will not leave you in the place that you were... in the bondage of slavery to Egypt... I will physically remove you from your broken circumstance... I WILL BE THE ONE WHO SAVES YOU because

after 430 years of oppression it is MORE THAN CLEAR that you can not save yourselves. Obviously, we see parallels to the Gospel here... we see a foreshadowing of what Jesus will do (as we see in much of the Jewish traditions that give us a picture of what the Gospel ultimately does.)

The second cup is called the cup of deliverance, or sometimes it's called the cup of plagues or even the cup of judgment, and I will try and explain why all of those titles make sense to me.

A lot of people view the passover account as a bit of a prequel of judgment. You get this image of death knocking at the door, and ONLY the homes who were covered in the blood of the lamb were spared... but the fact that it happened WAS WHAT ultimately lead to them being set free... to the promise actually coming to pass.

Typically in Christian adaptation of this, we call it: The cup of deliverance... after God gets them out of Egypt... He knows "that was 430 years of learning things that weren't right... 430 years of being convinced that you aren't worth a whole lot... that the only value you bring comes from the amount of bricks that you can produce... 430 years of bitterness toward the people who have hurt you and even maybe toward the God who you feel like JUST LET IT HAPPEN FOR A LONG TIME.

and yes, now I have removed Israel from Egypt... but the next work that needs to be done is getting the Egypt out of Israel."

Or you could say it more like this: God... you did what you needed to do to get us out... now, do in me whatever you need to do, so that you can get out of me what needs to come out.

Again it is back to that image of pruning... its saying to God: God, I don't want to be like Egypt.... I don't want to be one of the branches that gets cut off, I want to be one that gets PRUNED SO THAT I can actually be who I am supposed to be.

The second cup is the one that is partaken of DURING the meal... which, to me makes sense because, at least to me, that kind of represents the lump sum of our time... our life on this earth is that pruning process... that

process of deliverance, of God making us into the people that He intends for us to be.

See, God has a plan and a dream for your life which we will get into in a moment, and the only one who can get in the way of that is YOU.

The third cup is the one that is most theologically significant for Christians and that is the cup of redemption, which was drunk AFTER the meal.

Now, to redeem means to “put back to what it was” - it is God putting US BACK TO THE STATE THAT HE CREATED US AND INTENDED FOR US TO BE.

So if I have a book sitting on a shelf, and I knock it off the shelf and it flies across the room... I can go and pick it back up again... I can dust it off... I can even still use it on the other side of the room... BUT IN ORDER TO REDEEM IT I would need to put it BACK in the place that I originally had it.

- we all know that God created the world with a perfect order and mankind broke that... it is essentially what the entire argument thus far in Romans has been... they traded the glory... the original design... for something else and because of that things have gotten off.

But God promised to redeem it. He said “I will put this back” - it was the first covenant that he made... yes, man... you have screwed this thing up... BUT I AM GOING TO BRING IT BACK TO WHAT I CREATED IT TO BE.

Now... the cup of redemption you would drink after you have eaten. So when Jesus was eating that last meal... the last supper with his disciples it says AFTER THEY HAD EATEN (Paul makes it very clear in 1 Corinthians 11, after supper was over, Jesus took the cup... so they would have been on the third cup. Matthew's Gospel and Luke's Gospel also say it... Luke 22:20 says “HE TOOK THE CUP AFTER THEY HAD EATEN”

So if they had already eaten the passover meal, and Jesus picks up the cup, they would now be partaking in the third cup, the cup of redemption, which... how ironic is this???: already was the symbol FOR THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB that caused death to pass over the people of Israel.

and before drinking of it, Jesus says something different than they were probably expecting Him to say...

He says “this cup that is poured out for you... IS THE NEW COVENANT in MY BLOOD.”

The cup of REDEMPTION... the CUP OF GOD BRINGING THE WORLD BACK TO WHAT IT WAS CREATED TO BE... is now being called the cup of the NEW COVENANT.

Now, turn your Bibles to Jeremiah 31:31-34

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

They shall ALL know me... from the least to the greatest... I will forgive them... I will remember their sin no more.

Even though I was their husband... and they broke my heart... I will return to them... I will put them back into that marriage relationship with me.

Jesus is telling His followers that this cup represents His blood... AND THIS IS HOW YOU WILL BE REDEEMED. (Joe Amaral)

This is how God is going to do what God has said ALL ALONG that He would do...

Israel was expecting a King... Israel was expecting a political ruler who would overthrow Caesar and fight to make right all of the things that were done wrong to them... and instead God chooses to do it all through a man who never held a political office or a military post... who taught that we must lay down our rights for the sake of His Kingdom... who says that when someone hits you, to “turn the other cheek” - who didn’t even defend Himself when they came for Him... but who truly was the only Israelite who was ever truly faithful to what God desired.

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Now, with that, I want us to look at the passage again... first, I am going to read verses 21-24 out of Eugene Peterson’s translation “The Message,” just so that you are able to get a more clear understanding of this from someone who did the hard work of making it so these words are understandable. I don’t often use the Message, but it seems appropriate here:

“But in our time something new has been added. What Moses and the prophets witnessed to all those years has happened. The God-setting-things-right that we read about has become Jesus-setting-things-right for us. And not only for us, but for everyone who believes in him. For there is no difference between us and them in this. Since we’ve compiled this long and sorry record as sinners (both us and them) and proved that we are utterly incapable of living the glorious lives God wills for us, God did it for us. Out of sheer generosity he put us in right standing with himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we’re in and restored us to where he always wanted us to be. And he did it by means of Jesus Christ.

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I love the way that this begins by saying “But in our time” - the ESV says “but now” - and it literally is saying “now. as in today” - It is not just the turning point in Paul’s argument... it is literally saying that what God said He was going to do... What he said he would do all along in all of the writers we are familiar with...

He has done... and we are living in it TODAY. Hold on to that until the end...

But what I want you to see here through this interpretation is not only THAT GOD HAS DONE, *through Jesus* what He always promised that He would do...

But also that God actually has a vision for your life... a plan... a dream... there is something that God has for you... something that He has ALWAYS WANTED US TO BE... and we can run from our call, but we can not REMOVE our call. And what this is saying IS not only that God put us in right standing with Him... but also that HE has empowered us right now TO BE THE PEOPLE WE ARE SUPPOSED TO BE.

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The 4th cup of passover is called “the cup of praise” - it is known as “the Halal” - which literally means “I can’t believe that it is this good.”

and that is the point of the 4 cups... It is that God wants to bring you from Salvation... all the way to fulfillment... all the way to the point where you live the fullest life imaginable... all the way to the point where you are excited to get out of bed in the morning because of the mission that you get to be a part of...

you are excited to go to work.

Most of us live our entire Christian lives believing that God wants something FROM US... when in reality... GOD WANTS SOMETHING FOR US.

and when you look into a reflection of all that your life has held, and get even a glimpse of what you deserve... when you realize that God is flushing all of that down the toilet and still intends on using you FOR great things... then you can drink of that 4th cup saying “I can’t believe that it is this good.”

The 4th “I will” statement says: I will take you to be my people.

For the Jewish people, it was a proposal. It was God saying to sinful Israel “I am choosing, in the midst of all that is wrong with you... that I want you to be my beloved.”

I CAN'T BELIEVE IT IS THIS GOOD.

But like we read in Jeremiah... Israel was NEVER faithful to God... EVEN THOUGH HE WAS THEIR HUSBAND... and yet what does it say?

I will establish a NEW COVENANT... not like the Old one... and I WILL KEEP IT...

does that not make it so easy to drink that forth cup? I know that I am NOT THIS GOOD.... and yet God would recklessly pursue me even through my unfaithfulness to Him?

I can't believe it is this good.

Now, going back to the ESV translation. verses 23-26 have been said to be among the most dense passages in the entire Bible... and we are going to try and look at them briefly but sensibly in light of everything else that we have learned.

Verse 23 says “all have sinned and fallen short of the GLORY of God”

again... we focus on the sin part... but we pay very little attention to the fact that there is a GLORY we were created to live in and yet we all fall short because we have exchanged that glory for sin.

There has always been more for us THAN WHAT we walk in... God has designed... Ephesians says God PREPARED beforehand a calling that we are meant to WALK IN... and yet just like Israel... we fall short of that which we were created to be... but the best news in the world IS THAT GOD DOESN'T.

We will look at something that makes this SO clear on Easter Sunday when Paul wraps up this argument with the most perfect seal...

BUT THIS IS THE POINT OF THIS PASSAGE. It is so much bigger than just YOU AND I SINNING AND GOD FORGIVING US... we do sin... and God does forgive us...

but we call this the culmination because this is the moment in which we find out that God TRULY HAS DONE what He promised that He would do... through all of the covenants that He made with Israel, INCLUDING THE ONE WITH ABRAHAM that said "you will be the Father of MANY NATIONS" - NOT JUST ISRAEL... God will redeem many nations... not just Israel... and what Paul is saying here is that the covenant that God made with Abraham He has now kept with both the Jews and the Gentiles...

right after "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory", it says... and are JUSTIFIED (declared righteous) -

okay... we have in several of these teachings now talked about the court of law... and how God is judge but HE IS A RIGHTEOUS JUDGE... and again, this is where it culminates.

And this DOES NOT WORK if you don't understand last week... and it DOES NOT WORK if you don't understand what we talked about in the first half of chapter 2... Because IF YOU STAND ON YOUR OWN MERITS, AND WHAT YOU HAVE DONE (if you plan to stand before God and give Him reasons why you deserve Heaven)... you will stand alone... and if you stand alone, you will stand condemned... because like Paul said before this, quoting several Old Testament scriptures... NO ONE IS RIGHTEOUS.

BUT THE GOSPEL IS, that FOR EVERYONE WHO HAS FAITH IN JESUS... everyone who understands that they can't save themselves but that Jesus did that FOR THEM... Jesus will stand with them... THEIR MOUTH WILL BE SILENT, so that God Himself can speak DECLARING YOU RIGHTEOUS...

The judge declares you right. He has weighed the scales, and because Jesus is the one standing on your scale, God declares you righteous... and the moment that He does that, your STATUS changes from guilty... TO A

CHILD OF THE LIVING GOD... and if you know anything about the court of law, when you are tried and found INNOCENT... that status stays with you. You have all the rights of a person who has not committed a crime.

That is what it means to be JUSTIFIED... it means that God declares you to be IN THE RIGHT in His eyes... 2 Corinthians 5:21 "He made Him who knew no sin to BE SIN on our behalf, that we might become the RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD."

but read the whole line in Romans 2:24... they are JUSTIFIED by the grace of God through the what? the REDEMPTION that is in Christ Jesus.

so all are evil... all have fallen. God created them to be one way... He put us right where He wanted us... and we fell. We got knocked off of where God had for us...

but Jesus put us back. It was a change of your status before God, REDEEMED... PUT BACK TO WHERE GOD CREATED YOU TO BE.

In fact, the way the ESV puts this is actually like this:

"God put (Jesus) forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith"

The word "propitiation" - we don't have time to get deep into it because it's loaded and debated... but it points back to the concept of Yom Kippur and the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the people. By definition, propitiation is "to appease the wrath and attain the good will" - so the concept is that the goat was sacrificed on Yom Kippur, and that blood covered the sins of the entire community for the entire year.

The view of God has always been "there must be a sacrifice in order to appease Him" - in fact that is the way that it always was with all of the gods in the ancient world. But watch what God does this with:

On Yom Kippur, there were two goats...

The second goat was called Azazel, or “the scape goat” and it was taken, and the high priest confessed all of the sins of the people into the goat and then sent it away to a remote place... and they believed that the goat carried the iniquities of the people away to never be heard from again.

But the first goat was killed for it.

But when you read about sacrifice in Jewish writing... you always see that the blood of the animal was for the sake of LIFE. It was for the life of the people... it was always more than just what ISN'T HAPPENING TO THEM (as in: they are no longer going to be punished for their sins)... it was also what now can happen because God is giving them life... Remember the blood on the doorposts? (chet) life.

And throughout the Bible, we get this progression... in Abraham's day, you sacrificed to make atonement for your sin.

In Egypt, the blood of the lamb caused death to pass over your entire house...

later, when the law was given, the blood of a single goat covered all of the sins for the entire community for the entire year...

and here in Romans, we see that once and for all, the blood of Jesus covers all of the sins of the entire world, and anyone who confesses Jesus receives that covering.

But its pretty easy to see throughout the New Testament... that Jesus was all of it... Jesus was both goats... He was the last real Yom Kippur... He was the sacrifice. He was the Azazel - who carried our sins away. He was the lamb who was slaughtered. He was all of it.

But when you look at Romans 1, and you look at this list of sins... some of which you know you have committed, some of which you could never even imagine committing... then you think about Jesus taking all of that onto Himself... you realize...

This cost Him a whole lot.

Murderers... Slanderers... the sexually immoral... the gossips... the idol worshippers... the foolish, faithless... HEARTLESS... ruthless. The deceivers... THE HATERS OF GOD... THE PEOPLE WHO HATE HIM... HE DIED FOR.

and part of the reason that Paul gives us such a thorough list in Romans 1 is not only to show you that you are guilty... because we are all on there in one way or another...

But because He wants to show you that even though you were not faithful... God still is. He determined with complete resolve that He was going to keep His covenant...

as we prepare to close, look at verse 26:

It was to show his righteousness (God's covenant justice) at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Just like how in verse 21 it says "BUT NOW" and its talking about the literal now... something has happened, right now... this is such an important part... and to explain this, we need to go back to the passover Seder.

There actually was a fifth cup during the seder - it is known as "The Cup of Elijah" - but unlike the four cups, this one is never drank from.

this cup they would fill like any other cup, but it sits there, full of wine, because it was not for anyone who was at the table.

It was for a guest that wasn't there yet. Then, what would happen is someone would get up from the table and would go and open the front door and then they would return to the table with their family, leaving the door open.

And this was their way of saying "maybe, just maybe, the Messiah will come today" - and if He comes, we want to make sure we are ready.

So we have prepared a place for Him, we have cleaned the house... the table is set, the wine is poured and here we are... waiting.

Waiting for the Messiah to come, and to finally make right all that is wrong in our world... to finally bring justice... to finally bring peace.

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But what Romans 3:26 tells us is that God's covenant justice has made itself manifest in the present time... right here, and right now. We are not waiting for the Messiah to come one day... He has come. He has ushered in a new Kingdom and has redeemed us by His blood.

putting us back in right standing with God, and put back on the mission of God of redeeming and reconciling the whole world back to Him.

If the entire Bible really were just about how man is sinful and God had to save us... it would still be good news that He would be willing to save us... But the Bible is about so much more than just how screwed up we are and how we are saved.

We weren't just saved... WE WERE REDEEMED. We were put back.

and if you are in this place today and you would say to me "yeah, but you don't know what I have done..." well... I DO know what I have done... and I know how hard it has been for me to not only accept the fact that God still loves me and has actually sanctified, delivered AND PUT ME BACK where I belong... because just like the 4th cup says... we can't wrap our minds around how good God truly is...

But I am telling you... the point of the letter of Romans so far is that God in fact did do what He said that He would do... and He will continue doing it in your life... in your family... in our community. It doesn't matter what brought us to the place we are at in this moment... what matters is that He is there with us.

God made a promise... A promise that He will put back anyone who call on His name... we will learn next week... that for Abraham, the only thing he

had was faith... but it was enough. And IF WE HAVE IT... it will be enough for us too.

The writer of Hebrews calls the cross “the culmination of the ages” - it is the moment that everything that history was waiting for became a reality.

And then it says this... it says that Jesus WILL IN FACT COME AGAIN... a second time... but the second time it won't be to deal with sin, because that part has already been done (Hebrews 9:28) - but this time, it will be to rescue all those who are eagerly waiting for Him.

Which means that AS GOOD AS IT IS, the grace we get to live in TODAY... being a part of the Kingdom of Heaven today... changing the world by doing the work of reconciling it back to God today...

The best is yet to come...

We were saved, and we are being saved.

We were delivered, and we are being delivered.

We were redeemed, and we are being redeemed.

I can't believe that it is this good.