



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

What's the Use?

June 2, 2019

Romans 3:1-8

Clint Pressley

3 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? 2 Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. 3 What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? 4 By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written,

*“That you may be justified in your words,
and prevail when you are judged.”*

5 But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.) 6 By no means! For then how could God judge the world? 7 But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner? 8 And why not do evil that good may come? —as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.

(Pastor prays)

What's the use? Do you ever feel like saying that? When you try hard, when you give and work and love and pray and nothing changes? What good is it? What good is it being a church member, living in America, the most churched nation in the world? What's the use in being a person of faith?

Let's take our situation for example. 'We've just come off two months of going through Romans and hearing how everyone without Christ is under judgment. In Chapter 1, Paul declares the thesis of Romans. Romans 1: 16 says, *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* After saying

that, Paul then shows why gentiles are under judgment. And then in Chapter 2, Paul turns to the religious people, the chosen people, people like us who believe in God and go to church. And he says, “don't think that you have escaped judgment; you haven't.” Then he pours out wrath on the religious people all the way to the end of Chapter 2. And it leaves us wondering, then, what good is it to have the advantage of going to church or even believing in God?

Paul does something creative in Chapter 3, verses 1- 8. He asks a series of questions. In fact there are 9 questions in just 8 verses. In these eight verses, Paul sets up a debate anticipating push back. He preemptively lays out the great blessings that we enjoy as God's people. Today I want to turn your eye away from the judgment for a moment and I want you to see and feel and thank God for His good grace to us in Jesus.

God's Goodness in Jesus Should Bring Joy to Your Life

I want you to think about two things today. Here is the first one:

Think about your situation

You'll see this in verses 1-2. Look at the two questions in verse 1: *Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision?* They are basically asking the same thing and they are coming off the heels of chapters 1 and 2, in which Paul is basically saying that gentiles are condemned and Jews are condemned. So he asks, then what advantage has the Jew? And what is the value of the sign of the covenant? And after all he said in Chapter 2, you expect him to say there's no advantage. But that's not at all what he says, is it?

Look at the answer in verse 2. Much in every way! To begin with, or most of all, the Jews are God's people and are entrusted with the oracles of God. Oracle is “logia” which means *The Word of God*. This is the same blessing that you have. Think about your situation. You are surrounded by Bibles. If you do not have one in your hand, you have one on your phone, in the pew, in your car, by your bed or on the shelf. We put it on the screens if you don't have a copy. One of the greatest advantages you have, that the Jews had, is the Bible. Here is the self-revelation of God. Let me try to categorize and maybe convince you as to why this is such a great advantage. I'll use some categories that Kent Hughes uses.

The Bible is the written description of God's eternal nature. The Bible tells us who He is: that God is the all-powerful creator and sustainer of life! He is immutable and unchanging,

the one true God and worthy of our praise. And you have the advantage of knowing that through His Word. You don't have to guess who God is. It's written for you in your language.

The Bible tells us about our God who is perfect in righteousness, holiness, justice and love. He is full of love and mercy and worthy of our praise.

By God's word, we know His standards, expectations and limits. We know right and wrong, good and evil and how, in the end, God prevails.

By God's Word, we are made aware of the great gulf that exists between us and Him. That He is too holy for our eyes and we are too sinful for His.

Our situation is that we don't have to guess. We don't have to be idolaters and settle for all these lesser worldly things. Because of God's word, we have the advantage of seeing the falseness of the prosperity gospel and the brokenness of the sexual revolution. Because we have God's word, we learn that the God of the Bible is majestic, transcendent and beyond comprehension. There's no heart too hard, sinner too far gone or depression too deep that He won't break you out of. There is no sexual confusion too complicated. He is clear and merciful.

Because of God's Word, we know that the God of the Bible is close to the broken-hearted. We know that weeping lasts for a night, but what? Joy comes in the morning. The Bible tells us that God knows we are dust and that His kindness leads us to repentance...That a bruised reed He will not break and a smoldering wick He will not snuff out. On top of all that, from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible points us to the gospel of grace, not works.

The Bible is not only a written description of God's eternal nature.

We have a written description of our nature and purpose. The Bible tells us of our dignity. You are made in the image of God and therefore worthy of respect and created with inherent, latent, redeemable value. This speaks to how you treat people. We should be missionaries of mercy.

The Bible tells us of our need. It tells us that we are all sinners, the Jews and the gentiles, the rich and the poor. We are all in the same sinking boat, we are all in need of Jesus. He is the life, death and resurrection. One day, all will confess Jesus as Lord, some in worship, others in anguish.

The Bible tells us that we are redeemed. We are transformed from sinners to saints, from slaves to free, from orphans to children of the living God.

The Bible tells us that life is fragile. The Bible tells us that all flesh is like grass. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.

I want you to think clearly about your situation. Regardless of how bad it's been and the hurt or stresses that you have had. This word tells you that, in Christ, you are going to be OK. Think about your situation.

Think about God's sovereignty.

I want to take the rest of the passage and use it to help us think about the good hand of our God working in all things. Let's look at the next 2 questions in verse 3 and then his answer in verse 4. ³ *What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God?* What if so-called religious people actually turn out to be hypocrites? Does that mean that God isn't really good? Then let's look at verse 4 where Paul uses the strongest language available without saying a curse word. ⁴ *By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written,*

"That you may be justified in your words,

and prevail when you are judged."

By no means! May it never be! God forbid! Then he says, even if all people are liars, backbiters, sinners and hypocrites, God is still true. We don't quit loving, serving and worshipping God because some mean person at church didn't speak to us or some hero of ours let us down. All have feet of clay. And then in verse 4, Paul quotes the Bible. It's actually Psalm 51:4, written by David after he slept with another man's wife and then had the man murdered. And David's point is that when people sin, God is justified in judging them ultimately. All sins are against God.

Paul then carries the thought further in verses 5 through 6. ⁵ *But if our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say? That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? (I speak in a human way.)* ⁶ *By no means! For then how could God judge the world?*

Our unrighteousness brings about God's righteousness more clearly. The more sinful we are, the more glorious the Gospel appears. And then in verses 7 – 8, Paul doesn't even provide an

answer to the foolishness. ⁷ *But if through my lie God's truth abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?* ⁸ *And why not do evil that good may come? —as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just.*

Instead, he presents the beautiful doctrine of God's sovereignty and means of responsibility, that our faithlessness never alters God's faithfulness, and our sin never frustrates God's purposes. We are responsible for the sins we commit because they are an affront to God and a breach of His revealed word. It's why we need Christ. The God of the Bible is so good He can take what is bad and still get glory for it! We make wrong turns, bad decisions, past rebellions, and miss opportunities.

These are no challenge for the good mercy of God found in Jesus. I want you to develop a “big God” theology that reminds us God's grace is greater than all our sin...That the stained canvas of your heart is set up on the easel full of God's sovereignty and there He will paint a masterpiece of grace in the blood of Jesus...That God is never the cause of sin but 'He's always sovereign over sin. The deeper the sin, the greater God's grace and the truest picture of God's glory.

As an illustration, I'd like to end with a story from Luke 7: 36-48. ³⁶ *One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table.* ³⁷ *And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment,* ³⁸ *and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.* ³⁹ *Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.”* ⁴⁰ *And Jesus answering said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he answered, “Say it, Teacher.”*

⁴¹ *“A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.* ⁴² *When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?”* ⁴³ *Simon answered, “The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt.” And he said to him, “You have judged rightly.”* ⁴⁴ *Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.* ⁴⁵ *You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet.* ⁴⁶ *You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has*

anointed my feet with ointment.⁴⁷ Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven— for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.”⁴⁸ And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.” Then verse 50 says, and he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

Think about your situation. Think about God’s sovereignty. God’s goodness in Jesus will bring joy to your life.

(Pastor prays)