

SUMMER SERMONS

ROMANS 3:19-31

LIVING HOPE ON DEATH ROW



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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How long do you think prisoners spend on Death Row between their sentencing and their execution? Fifteen years. There are almost 3000 people on Death Row at any one time. Can you imagine what that must be like? Fifteen years with less and less hope as various appeals processes are exhausted.

You don't need to imagine it, because we are all on Death Row. We are all sentenced to death for our sins. But I want to give you living hope on Death Row by introducing you to seven men.

1. MR GOODNESS

Mr Goodness hardly needs an introduction. As we are all born hand in hand with him, we all know him very well. And we like him, because he's always telling us how good we are. And if we have any doubts about our goodness, he helps us to find excuses, blame others, or find others worse than we still look good beside.

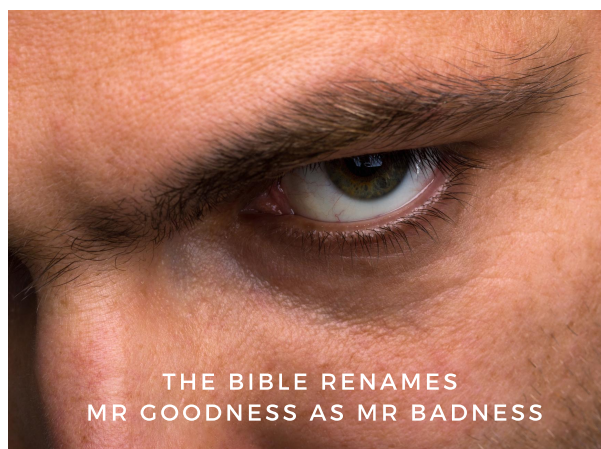
As Mr Goodness is extremely experienced, persuasive, skillful, and dangerous, the Apostle Paul spends the first few chapters of Romans attacking him. And in Romans 3, Paul takes the kill-shot by multiplying sharp scripture proofs of universal human sinfulness. Look at the underlined words in these verses. What's his point?

We have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one" (Romans 3:9-12).

Though there are times when Mr Goodness is driven out of our lives, he keeps resurrecting and whispering, "You're not that bad. You are not as bad as most people. You have redeeming features. You've done enough to overcome the bad things." That's why Paul reminds us again later that **all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (23)**.



If Mr Goodness is still whispering this in your ear, come back to this chapter and pray, "Lord, kill Mr Goodness in my life, so that I don't believe his lies."



THE BIBLE RENAMES
MR GOODNESS AS MR BADNESS



2. MR GUILTY

Paul has used the law of God to attack Mr Goodness, who now lies dying on the floor. At this point, Mr Guilty enters the room and every one stops talking. Guilt stops our mouths. We realize that we have no defence, alibi, or excuse.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God [NKJV]: may become guilty before God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:19-20)

Mr Guilty puts us in chains and drags us again and again to Mr Law (we'll look at him a bit later). Mr Law presents us with two documents: God's precepts to be obeyed and God's penalties to be suffered.

♥ How do you respond to Mr Guilty? Are you still trying to argue with him using human standards or has he silenced you with God's law?



3. MR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Into this gloomy room walks Mr Righteousness. **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 (Romans 3:21-22).**

Mr Righteousness has a nickname; Mr Law-Satisfier. He comes to the law, looks at the precepts to be obeyed and the penalties to be suffered and says I can do both.

But how come Mr Righteousness has a righteousness **apart from the law**? How can he be a law-satisfier without the law. It's like saying red tomatoes are not red.

This cannot mean what it seems to mean – a law satisfaction without satisfying the law. Rather it is a law satisfaction without any regard to our attempted law-satisfying. Mr Righteousness offers a law-satisfaction that is completely separate and independent from our attempted law-satisfying.

It is also a **righteousness of God** (21, 22). This is not a mere human righteousness but a divine righteousness. This is not a mere man that has obeyed the precepts and suffered the penalties. It is God himself. Can you imagine the value of that law-satisfaction. If a mere human being could achieve perfect righteousness it would only be enough for one person. But divine righteousness is infinitely valuable and can extend to a multitude greater than we can number.

Who is this Mr Righteousness? He's been around for a long time. **The law and the prophets bear witness to him**, but he's now been **manifested** (revealed) more clearly (25, 26). Who is Mr Righteousness? It's Mr Jesus Christ. He can obey the precepts and suffer the penalties until they are exhausted. He is the righteousness of God.



Do you think you can add anything to Mr Righteousness? Do you think you can make him any better? "All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (Isa. 64:6).



4. MR FAITH

So, we're chained to Mr Guilty. We're on Death Row and have no hope apart from Mr Righteousness. But how do we get unchained from Mr Guilty and connected with Mr Righteousness? That's where Mr Faith comes in. **The righteousness of God [is] through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction (22).**

Mr Faith can sever us from Mr Guilt and connect us with Mr Righteousness. As soon as we believe, faith smashes the chain of guilt and connects the soul with perfect righteousness. Mr Righteousness, Jesus Christ, is **received by faith (25).**

And this is not just for special believers, for those with special faith, or even strong faith. **It's for all who believe. For there is no distinction (23).** Paul loves Mr Faith and refers to him again and again.

[We] 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...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 (24-26)



Instead of hearing, "Guilty, guilty, guilty!" by faith in Christ, we now hear not just, "Innocent, innocent, innocent!" but "Perfect, perfect, perfect!" All precepts obeyed, all penalties paid.



What about after salvation?
Is the salvation just functional or is it also relational?



5. MR BOASTING

The light has gone on, the dust is settling, we are enjoying this salvation. Paul looks around and says, "Where is Mr Boasting?" **Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded (27).**

Mr Boasting is best friends with Mr Goodness. They go everywhere together. Once Mr Goodness has done his work, Mr Boasting steps in with praise and applause: "You're amazing. Look at all the good you've done. You'r far better than most people"

But faith turns the spotlight from self to Christ. And when that happens, boasting is evicted and runs away, cursing Mr Faith. **[Boasting] is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law (27-28).**

Mr Boasting sometimes gets back together with Mr Goodness and they stick their heads in the window and their foot in the door from time to time. But with the help of chapters like Romans 3 they are expelled and kept at a safe distance.



Mr Goodness and Mr Boasting are best friends, but our worst enemies. Have regular searches for them in your soul and if you find them, evict them without delay.



6. MR LAW

So faith has chased away Mr Goodness, Mr Guilt, and Mr Boasting. What about Mr Law? Does Mr Faith chase him away too? Let Paul answer: **Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law (31).**

Every other pretended way of salvation diminishes the law in one way or another: its precepts or its penalties. In one way or another, the law is overthrown. It promises salvation by lowering the barrier or by compromising justice, etc. Is that what God has done here?

No, this way of salvation strengthens and confirms the law. Christ's righteousness reached the standard perfectly, and suffered the penalties fully. That's why Paul says God is both **just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (26)**. He is "a just God and a Savior" (Isa. 45:21)



Be highly suspicious of any promised salvation which overthrows, or in any way diminishes, the law of God.



7. MR JOY

Mr Goodness has gone. Mr Guilt has gone. Mr Boasting has gone. Who do we have left? Mr Righteousness, Mr Faith and Mr Law. And then walks in our seventh man, Mr Joy.

Mr Joy says to Mr Law "Are you happy?" "I'm happy," he replies, "my precepts have been met, my penalties satisfied. Rejoice!"

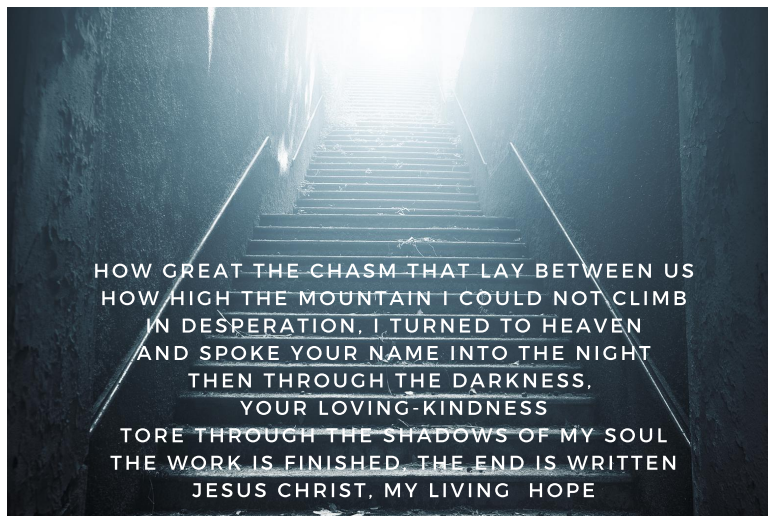
"Mr Righteousness, you happy?" "Of course! I still have a perfect complete righteousness. Rejoice!"

Mr Faith, you happy?" "Sure, I've severed another person from sin and united it with perfect righteousness! Rejoice!"

"And what about you believer?" asks Mr Joy. "Me? Who could be happier! The law is satisfied. Guilt has gone. Righteousness is mine. And all by faith without any contribution from me." What a happy scene. What a happy salvation!



Here is living hope for all on death row. It doesn't matter how you got there or how long you've been there or how close you are to execution. Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved (Acts 16:31).



MEMORY CHALLENGE

Read the notes, write the right name (Mr....?) beside the picture and explain the connection.



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