

November 5, 2017

“The Message We Bear”  
Romans 3:21-26

FCF: Uncertainty of our message.

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) We have been given a message for the world.

(magnet) And that message is unlike anything the world has ever heard.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

This is the seventh in a series of ten messages on gospel-driven outreach. We’ve looked at the basic call to outreach, who it is that sends us, our shared task as a community, how we view people around us, the larger story we are living in, and the need to pray for opportunities.

That’s been pretty comprehensive. And it brings us now to this. With all that said, what are we to say? By that, I don’t mean the particular details of phrasing and such. That’s driven by where people are and the flow of the conversation. I just mean: what is this message we bear?

**SCRIPTURE READING:** Romans 3:21-26

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

*The Mission* is a 1986 film, the story of a Jesuit priest named Gabriel, played by Jeremy Irons, and a mercenary named Mendoza, played by Robert De Niro ([READ MBI, pp.94-95](#)):

Gabriel is commissioned to build a mission in South America for the Guarani Indians. On the way, he meets Mendoza. Mendoza has made slaves of some of the Guarani people. He has also killed his brother in a jealous rage over a woman, and is now inconsolable, trapped in a prison of guilt and regret. Gabriel attempts to persuade the guilt-stricken man to accompany him to the Guarani village where he has committed so many of his sins.

Speaking words of hope, Gabriel says, “There is life.”

The slave trader counters, “There is no life!”

Gabriel says, “There is a way out, Mendoza.”

“For me there is no redemption,” Mendoza says.

Gabriel responds, “God gave us the burden of freedom. You chose your crime; do you have the courage to choose your penance? Do you dare do that?”

“There is no penance hard enough for me.”

“But do you dare try it?”

“Do I dare? Do you dare to see me fail?”

As they begin the arduous journey, the priest straps a huge sack of armor on Mendoza’s back. To reach the village, the men must travel over cliffs and waterfalls. What would be perilous for the most experienced hiker is virtually impossible for someone with a hundred-pound sack of armor strapped to his back.

It’s a dramatic scene. But what is this redemption that Mendoza seeks? The penance of his climbing over the cliffs and the waterfalls with the pack upon his back assumes his ability to offset the awful deeds of his past through such works. That is, his merits offsetting his demerits.

Which is how we naturally tend to think. We are accustomed to earning this and meriting that in school, sports, and work. And it’s the way many believe we are made right with God. We have this instinctive sense that something is wrong, that there is a gulf caused by our sin. And then, with that, we have this idea we need to fix it. And that we can. Which is all partly right.

But partly wrong. And devastatingly so. For, yes, there is the necessity of the damage to our relationship with God being fixed. But there is also our utter inability to do it ourselves.

Which then takes us to our text and the question about our message. For we have been given a message for the world. And it is utterly absolutely unlike anything the world has ever heard.

For this is a message of the grace of God, the cross of Christ, and the place of faith.

## **I. THE GRACE OF GOD**

First, the grace of God. If there is hope, what is its source? (**READ Romans 3:22b-24a**).

### *A) Justification*

There's a heavy term Paul uses here that we need to understand - justification.

#### 1. Legal context

It speaks to a legal context - a courtroom, a judge, and a defendant standing accused in the dock.

#### 2. Legal declaration

And in that legal context comes a legal declaration from the judge. "Your guilt and shame have been removed. Your punishment has been taken away." It's a status pronounced and bestowed.

### *B) As a Gift*

That's the essence of justification. And Paul tells us that it comes to us only as a gift.

#### 1. What we deserve

(**READ Romans 3:22b-23**) What we deserve is another legal declaration - condemnation.

#### 2. What we receive

That's what we deserve. But what we receive is God's unmerited favor that comes to us as "the righteousness of God" (**READ Romans 3:21-22a**). That is to say, a righteousness from God.

That's the message we bear before the world - the grace of God.

### *Application:*

That's the hope of the gospel. Despite all we've done, despite our struggles, the secrets we hide or the hurts we caused, our legal status before God can be made utterly shockingly new.

We have a message for the world. And it is unlike anything the world has ever heard.

## **II. THE CROSS OF CHRIST**

Which takes us to the grounds for this hope, the cross of Christ (**READ Romans 3:24-25**).

### *A) The Dilemma*

There is a dilemma. And this has to do with how a merciful God can still be just.

#### 1. The guilty unpunished

How can the guilty go unpunished without condoning sin and compromising God's holiness?

#### 2. The moral order undone

If that stood, the moral order would be undone. There would be no hope for any absolutes at all.

### *B) The Solution*

It's a real dilemma Paul speaks to here. And so too is God's solution - the cross of Christ.

#### 1. Redemption

This is the redemption of sinners - of slaves purchased in the marketplace in order to be set free.

2. Propitiation

This is the propitiation of God's wrath - the removal and satisfaction of his holy fury.

3. Demonstration

This is the demonstration of God's justice - showing all along this is what he had in mind.

That's the message we bear before the world - the cross of Christ.

*Application:*

We are all enmeshed, entrapped, and enslaved to the ways of the world, the pull of the flesh, and the work of the devil. But there is hope of redemption and a call to a better Master.

We have a message for the world. And it is unlike anything the world has ever heard.

### III. THE PLACE OF FAITH

Which takes us to the final point, the place of faith ([READ Romans 3:22a, 25a, 26](#)).

*A) Explanation*

You hear it mentioned throughout this text. But what is it? What is faith? Two things.

1. Assent

First, assent. That is, understanding the facts of the gospel and acknowledging them as true.

2. Embrace

Then second, an embrace. That is, a life gladly confessing and heeding the Lord's commands.

*B) Clarification*

So there is what we might call both the root of faith and then its fruits, the outworking of its reality. But it can be very easy to get confused at this point. So let me make a clarification.

1. Not the grounds

Our faith has no saving value, no merit. We do nothing here. It is not the grounds of our hope.

2. But the means

It is the means of our hope. It is the instrument by which the grace of God and the benefits of the cross of Christ come to us. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

That's the message we bear before the world - the place of faith.

*Application:*

Our faith has an object. It is the finished work of Christ. And that faith is then but the eye that looks to him, the hand that receives his gift, and the mouth that drinks the living water.

We have a message for the world. And it is unlike anything the world has ever heard.

### CONCLUSION:

We started with a scene from *The Mission*. I want to end with one from John Bunyan's classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It's the tale of a man named Christian - his conversion, his journey of faith, and the struggles he faces. Here's the scene from early in story ([READ quote](#)):

Now I saw in my dream, that the highway up which Christian was to go was fenced on either side with a wall, and that was was called Salvation. Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty because of the load on his back. He ran thus till he came to a place somewhat ascending. And upon

that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up to the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders and felt from off his back and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome and said with a merry heart, 'He hath given me rest by His sorrow and life by His death.' Then he stood still awhile to look and wonder, for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked therefore and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks.

You see the difference. Mendoza has to labor to lose his burden. Christian has it done for him.

That makes a world of difference. The Pilgrim's Progress is in line with the gospel. For the gospel is not advice, counsel, or instruction as to how to carry or rid ourselves of our burden. It's the news of how Christ has taken it on himself and taken it away. That's why it's good news.

We have a message for the world. And it is unlike anything the world has ever heard.

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) We have been given a message for the world.

(magnet) And that message is unlike anything the world has ever heard.