

TEXT: Romans 3:21-25a, 27-28

THEME: RIGHTEOUSNESS, ROAD CONSTRUCTION, AND REDEMPTION

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. ... Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. NIV

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

It's summertime now, and that means that the road construction season is in full swing. During the road construction season, I find myself spending a lot of time looking for something that isn't there. What I mean is that I spend a lot of time looking for short cuts, looking for ways to avoid the construction, and often times, those short cuts just aren't there. The shortcuts that I take are dead ends. Often, I end up back where I started.

I believe that this is how it is when people are looking for a way to get to heaven, looking for a way to be right with God. The Bible calls that "**righteousness.**" "**Righteousness**" means that you are right with God, that you are going to heaven for sure, that's righteousness. Many people are looking for righteousness in their lives. But they're running into all kinds of road construction—all kinds of barriers and dead ends. "How do I find righteousness?" people wonder. "How do I get to heaven? How do I make myself right with God?"

There are different roads that people try to follow. We call them "law-roads." A "law-road" is a road that appeals to our natural law, our natural sense of right and wrong: "Maybe if I turn onto the 'be a good person' road," you say. "Maybe if I turn onto the 'be a good family person' road," you think. "Maybe if I travel on the 'work hard at your job' road, I will get to heaven," you reason. But you can't be a perfectly good person, a perfectly good family person, a perfectly good worker, so those roads don't get you to heaven. They don't make you right with God. There is no righteousness on those law roads.

Where exactly is the road to righteousness? Where exactly is the road to heaven? How do you get there? So many dead ends! Finally, you stop and ask for directions—you know by now that most people don't have a clue—most people are aimlessly driving down one of those roads you had been on before. But then you meet God, and you ask God, "Which road is the road to righteousness? Which road is the road to heaven? I'm lost!" And God says to you, "It's a road you've never been on before. It's a new road, a road that's not manmade, a road that I built." "**But now, a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.**"

There's one key phrase in that passage—do you see it—"a righteousness from God, **APART FROM LAW.**" There's another kind of road that does lead to heaven, and that road is different from all those other law roads—the "be a good person" road, the "be a

good family person” road, the “be a good career person” road—apart from all those other roads, there’s a new road that’s different from all the rest. A new way which has been made known through the law and prophets, in other words, through the Bible.

“What is that road?” you ask. And God says to you, **“This righteousness comes from God, through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”** It’s the “faith in Jesus Christ” road. That’s the road to righteousness. That’s the road to heaven.

What exactly does that mean—faith in Jesus Christ? Faith is two things. Faith is, first of all, giving up. In other words, you give up trying to earn your way to heaven by being a good person, a good family person, a good worker. Those are all good things to do, and we do them. But you give up trying to earn your way to heaven by doing those things. Faith is, first of all, giving up. Faith is, second of all, completely trusting in Christ to earn your way to heaven for you. That’s faith. And it has to be that way.

“But why?” you ask God. “Why don’t those other roads work?” God answers you in verse 23: **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** No matter how hard you try to be a perfect person, you still fall short of what God wants you to be. You can never be the perfect family person, the perfect worker. All have sinned, and fall short.

So how does a person get to heaven? What is the road to righteousness? The road to righteousness is depending on Jesus and his sacrifice, instead of yourself, and your own goodness. The Bible calls that faith.

Imagine being lost in Gary, Indiana, at night. The road construction detours forced you off the highway, and you have become confused, and now, you are so lost, you’ll never find your way home unless someone helps you. Then someone walks up to your car, a total stranger, and he tells you that he will show you the way. “Move over,” he says, “let me drive. Trust me,” he says, “and I’ll show you the way.” Would you do that? Probably not—you’d probably drive away as fast as possible, which would be the smart move.

But that’s how it is when it comes to finding the road to heaven. Because of your sins, you are completely lost in this world, so lost that you could never find the road to heaven by yourself. But then Jesus Christ comes up to you, and says to you, “Let me show you the way. Move over, and let me drive. Trust me, and I’ll take you to heaven.” Will you let him? If you do, that’s faith.

And then you look up, and you see a very scary sight—you see the driver of your car, Jesus Christ, hanging on a cross, suffering. You actually see all of your sins being placed on top of Jesus, which causes him to suffer even more. You can hardly stand to look, but you do. And then, farther down the road, you see that this same Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. You see that your sins are no longer on top of him, but are now completely gone. And then, you see that you’ve reached your final destination, you’ve reached heaven. You’ve made it to righteousness. You realize that this is how you are saved, this is the road to righteousness—trusting in Jesus, and his sacrifice for your sins.

Our reading ends: **“Where then is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.”** Faith in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, that’s the road to heaven. That’s why we don’t boast about our own good works—those good works don’t get us to heaven—only faith in Jesus Christ does.

Here’s what some of our newer members have said, when they realized that this was the way to heaven:

“I felt an incredible sense of relief.”

“I feel like a big weight has been lifted off my shoulders.”

“Now I know where I’m going in life, and what happens when I pass on to the next life.”

“I finally get it.”

As you see all those construction barrels this summer, all those flashing lights, all those dead ends, remember this: the road to heaven stands wide open before you. It has been constructed by Jesus Christ himself. There are no dead ends on that road. Jesus Christ has taken all of our sins away—all the obstacles are gone. May God bless you as you walk that road, the only road that leads to heaven. Amen.

—*Pastor Richard D. Starr*

Prayer of the Church

Lord God, heavenly Father, accept our thanks and praise for revealing Your will to us in Your law. Experience has taught us that it is to our advantage to obey Your law, for disobeying it only makes our lives miserable. While we believe that obeying Your law brings blessings, we do not believe that keeping it can bring us any nearer to eternal life.

All of us have sinned and fallen short of Your glory. We should be more diligent teaching Your will to our children, but we make excuses for ourselves by saying we do not have time. We neglect opportunities to speak about You when we are working, before we go to bed, and when we greet the morning sun. We pride ourselves that we do not sin as often or as flagrantly as others. Yet our boasting is vain for even one sin makes us sinners. Because of this, Lord, we have no place to turn except to Your mercy. For the sake of Jesus Christ, our resurrected Lord, who shed His blood as the full payment for our sins, forgive us, O Lord.

Help us, O Lord, to build our spiritual house on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ and His Word. Through Your Holy Spirit, strengthen our faith to endure the trials and sorrows of life. Not only for ourselves, but also for our families and associates, with whom You have placed us, we pray.

O Lord, we thank You for bringing Shirley Rexin safely through surgery this past Wednesday. Bring healing to her as she battles cancer. Relieve her distress, strengthen her faith, and grant her recovery according to Your will.

Lord of life, we thank You for blessing Mike and Megan Hayes with a baby girl, Marie Grace. Keep parents, big brother Mason, and Marie under Your protection, and graciously meet their physical and spiritual needs.

Lord of love, we thank You for the 90 years of grace You have granted to Your servant Ella Schroeder. We praise You for being with her in good days and evil, in joy and sorrow, in sickness and health. We praise You above all for having provided her with the rich comfort of Your Word and sacraments. Continue to make these treasures her joy and delight. Be her strength, even when earthly strength fails. And finally bring her and all of us to the joy and glory of eternal life in Your presence.

O Lord of all, safeguard the freedoms and liberties protected by the laws of our land. With faith in Jesus Christ, the only Source of our righteousness, we also pray the prayer he taught us:

THE LORD'S PRAYER