

DO ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME?, ROMANS 3:21-31

Pax Romana #7

◆ **Intro:** You've heard the phrase "all roads lead to Rome."

There's a lot of history behind that. The Roman culture, first as a republic and then as an Empire lasted about 1000 years (roughly 500BC-500AD)! That's a long time for a nation. Over the course of that time they built roads all across Europe, Britain, the Mideast, and northern Africa. Here's a map of their road system. (show) At the peak of the Roman Empire, there were



over 400,000 km(250,000 miles) of roads connecting the provinces to Rome. Obviously none of the roads in Britain led to Rome, per se. Initially, of course all roads did lead to Rome, at

least in Italy! (show) That was by design, so the army could quickly dispatch across the empire, and so trade would smoothly reach the capital.



◆ But over the years that phrase became a little proverb meaning, "there are lots of ways to achieve the same result." Some people like to think of religions this way, as though it matters not what religious road you believe in as long as you firmly believe it. But that my friends lacks any real sensible credibility. What we've been seeing so far in the book of Romans is that, frankly, *no roads we humans devise will ever lead us to heaven or God*, though people continue to expect this. Some think if I'm basically nice, that qualifies. Some think it's a balance act. For example, Muhammad Ali said:

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◆ "One day we're all going to die, and God is going to judge [our] good deeds and bad deeds. If the bad outweighs the good, you go to hell. If the good outweighs the bad, you go to heaven."

◆ We've already seen this is not so. The payment for salvation is absolutely no bad deeds ever. No sin. Other's seem sure that sin is not a problem for them. Sophia Loren told USA

Today:

◆ "I'm not a practicant, but I pray. I read the Bible. It's the most beautiful book ever written. I should go to heaven; otherwise it's not nice. I haven't done anything wrong. My conscience is very clean. My soul is as white as those orchids over there, and I should go straight, straight to heaven."

◆ One supposes she skipped over Romans in her reading of the Bible... ("all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." v23) We tend to have high views of ourselves. On April 13, 2001, Luther Casteel walked into JB's Pub in Elgin, Illinois, with four guns and opened fire. He killed two people and wounded 16 others. At his trial, Casteel was unrepentant. He said,

◆ "As ironic as this sounds, I'm a passionate, giving person. I like to think I'm a pretty good person. I'm not one to hurt anyone that doesn't provoke me."

◆ You're right Luther, it does sound ironic, and also foolish. Yet many of our average townspeople think this very same way about themselves. In our text today Paul is basically telling us that the good news is, there is a road that leads to salvation.

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Only one. But praise God there is one! What do we know about this road?

◆1. God built the highway to heaven.

◆If the road to salvation is built by God, then it is obvious that I am not building it myself. It is a righteousness “from God”. (v21,22) This brings us back to 1:17. There is a way to get right, righteousness! There is a solution to international crisis, to thievery caught on camera, to lying politicians, to inequity of pay. And that solution is not anything mankind will ever come up with. It resides with God. (Spoiler alert: it’s forgiveness of sin through Jesus!) You will never conquer sin without Jesus. Don't bother trying!

◆Everything from 1:18-3:20 has been interlude talking about the results of sin in our world and why we should love this gospel of Jesus Christ! Paul knew what he was doing. He’s like a salesman painting a picture of our problems and then saying, “But have no fear, I have a solution to your problems!” (cf v21 “But now...”)

◆There are broken marriages. There is opioid abuse. There are homeless folk. There are many things wrong with the world! (that’s 1:18-3:20). BUT NOW...

◆Those of us who have gone on mission to Peru with Buckner will recall that one of the main things they do to help the poor is to teach them about filtering their water.

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Let me show you some **pictures: 1)** water barrel in slums outside Lima. **2)** Water truck delivery. We saw them pumping the water.



It was brown! Paul in Romans is like the missionary showing the native tribe that drinking the river water is what's killing their children. "But now"..., have no fear...there is a righteousness, a solution, a water-purifying filter that can save them! He's telling us too.

◆What's your dirty water that's killing you slowly? You will not fix it. You will not conquer wrong or sin. But God can! Get on your knees and go to him!

◆**2. Jesus' Christ has always been the only road to heaven.**

◆Many of you know what Jesus said. "*I am the way (road, ὁδός)... no man comes to the Father except through me.*"

Let me remind us that Jesus' life, death and resurrection was not a new idea on God's part.

◆*"No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began." 1 Corinthians 2:7, NIV.*

◆**A.** People get confused, I think, about God's activity in biblical history because of the language of the "new covenant" that was coming. Jesus said he brought the new covenant that the prophets spoke of. What did he mean? Lets go back to the OT.

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◆“The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

Jeremiah 31:31-33, NIV.

◆Because of this new covenant language, some Christians think that God operated one way in the OT (which they call the covenant of works) and when that didn’t work, he changed plans and decided to use Christ in the NT era to save people (the covenant of grace). This is in error. It’s always been a covenant of grace through Christ from the get-go! Let me show you a few samples:

◆vs21 “the law and the prophets”, the Jewish title for the OT scripture, Paul says, “testify” to this righteousness from God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.” In other words, everything in the OT was pointing toward Jesus. Is that just his notion?

◆Jesus said in the NT,

◆“Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.” John 8:56, NIV.

◆“*You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that*

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testify about me," ... "If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me." John 5:39, 46, NIV.

◆"Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." Luke 24:26, 27, NIV.

◆So Jesus' coming was not a secondary idea. The new covenant is perhaps more easily understood as new in the sense of an "update" of an app. By that I mean it didn't nullify the previous program, it still follows the same principles, only far better. It does more than the old app could do. Put it another way, it's like giving a computer to a person whose been using a typewriter their whole life. (Remember those?) You still type. It's still a machine that processes words. But the new, update, is so much more effective. Or think of a new Ford Mustang. It's still a Mustang, not a Ford Focus, but it's an update, it's more than the Mustang was. It's the new Mustang. Same way with the OT laws and Jesus' grace. Listen to the writer of Hebrews:

◆*"The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming--not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Hebrews 10:1-5, NIV.*

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◆The writer is pointing out that the OT sacrificial system was always pointing forward to a coming solution, one which would actually and finally pay off human sin once and for all. Notice vs 25

◆*"in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished."*

◆All the sins of the Israelites, the people, the priests, the patriarchs, the kings –all of them, for thousands of years, were never paid for by goats and sheep on altars. The animals represented the fact that something must pay and take their place. Their punishments were saved up, until they were all loaded on the shoulders of God's son, Jesus.

◆**B.** So when Jesus brought the new covenant, it wasn't a change in God's character or his practice, or a change in what now was permitted or not permitted. It was the fulfilling of what he began. Why is this significant? If there has always only been one way to find, get close to, have a relationship with God, then truth is truth for all time. It doesn't change with the government, or the times, or the culture, or popular opinion. God is consistent across the board, across the borders, across the ages. There is one, very real and true answer to every human's sin problems: redemption through Christ. That's very good news!

◆1) We can know our destiny! We don't have to live like worshipers of other gods do, in nervous fear of what the god might do next, or how it might change the rules on us.

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Further, we are not left waiting to find a cure. You do not need to live anxiously waiting for the day when you finally do something well enough to attract God's love to you and earn yourself a way in. We do not have to hope against hope that a solution to school shootings might be someday found. There already is one.

✦2) Just as the Bible teaches there are not multiple gods, so also it tells us there are not multiple ways to God, and there are not multiple answers to human evil. People need to hear of the true way. Don't be ashamed of the gospel of Christ! (1:16) It's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes! That means that Islam is not good for your Muslim neighbor. He needs Christ as much as you. It means your friend who is a Jehovah's Witness is not just fine as she is. But don't just tell her that. Tell her about Jesus! We are not being nice to let everyone believe what they like about destiny without sharing the truth. She needs to know the gospel of Christ! It means your atheist family member is not well off. He needs Jesus to fully live. Be bold, Christians! Share the cure you've found! Don't be ashamed of it. It's not your's. It's God's.

✦3. God's road to heaven is both graciously loving and absolutely fair.

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◆ *"he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus."* Romans 3:26, NIV.

◆**A.** God is "just" and fair: that is he did not turn a blind eye to the sins of mankind and decide he didn't mind. He hasn't turned one to yours and he won't turn one to those who sin against you. No one wants a judge or court that does. You can't depend on justice if so. What about when someone wrongs you or your child? Will you be OK with the judge not minding? No, law matters. That's verse 31

◆*"Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law."* Romans 3:31, NIV.

◆The laws God gave the Israelites still mattered. Truth remains true. Wrong was still wrong and it will not be let off your hook!

◆**B.** AND God is the one who "justifies" sinners, or made a way for his love to win out for them. These twin characteristics of God (perfect justice, and perfect compassion) are joined together in his Son, our Lord Jesus.

◆Our text today is really a perfect and succinct summary of the Gospel message. You could use this passage to explain Christianity to someone. Very quickly lets make sure we know what Paul means. Three words help us understand it.

◆1) Justified means to be made right or righteous. Every where you see the term "just" or "justify" or "righteous" or

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"righteousness" -it's all the same root word. It's a court of law term. To be justified is to be acquitted of the crime.

◆2) Redemption is literally "ransom". It's a slavery term that means to buy back, or to buy someone out of debt, or out of captivity, or slavery.

◆3) Atonement is a temple term that means not only to wipe sin off of someone, but also to take the punishment or, or wrath deserved. Someone was let go, and still

"justice was served", someone got punished. Think of a kid in the woods who whacked a bear cub with a stick.

Now the mother bear is racing at him, but dad shoves him into the river to get away, and lets the bear maul him instead.

◆So, Paul is saying 1) that Jesus is the victim that took the mauling we deserved, so we'd go free (atoned), 2) that Jesus paid the cost to buy us out of debt(redemption), and 3) that Jesus took all the convictions off our record making us "clean", "clear", and righteous in the eyes of the law (justified). When God looks at you, what does he see? I'll tell you! If you are a Christian he sees a holy child of his! A clean, and righteous person because of Christ. His heart smiles at the sight of you! He delights in you!

◆**Conclusion:** All this is accessed by faith in Jesus death for us. Listen closely, it is not accessed by the value or the

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intelligence of your faith. That is also his gift. It is not accessed by you're attempting to follow Jesus' example and earn your way to salvation. That's not atonement. Those are salvation by works or by good choices. Real faith is simply coming to God empty on the road of Christ. All roads do not lead to Rome and all religions do not lead to God. But thank God there is one!