

ROMANS 1-4: What Makes a Man a Believer

The Most Important Decision You Will Ever Make

Rough Transcript

Patrick Morley

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Hello, men, welcome to Man in the Mirror Bible Study. I'm Pat Morley, and today we're going to be talking about the most important decision you can ever make. Please turn in your Bibles to Romans chapter 3:21. Two days ago my wife and I were driving on the interstate. We were in the left-hand lane. We were going 10 miles an hour over the speed limit. It was a busy part of the interstate. I looked in my rear view mirror and about 10 feet off of my rear bumper was this huge white truck with big knobby tires and a very loud engine. It was obvious that he wanted to get by, he wanted me to pull over, but traffic was busy so I couldn't pull over. Then, when an opportunity finally did open up he swerved quickly to the right and then pulled back in front of me and road raged me, basically cut me off.

I said to my wife, "You know, I'm sure that a few people who do road rage are evil but I just feel like that guy is probably just in so much pain right now he doesn't know what to do with himself." Over the last couple of weeks the Lord allowed me to reminisce about the days just before and just after I became a Christian, and actually allowed me to relive the emotions of those days. He allowed me to remember the confusion, the frustration, that I had, helped me recall just how clueless I was about life in general. Two things in particular, how much I wanted to do good, knew what good was, but didn't have the power to do that. Then, secondly, just the angst, the desire for my life to have meaning, and to have purpose, to know and be known, to love and be loved. All of these things that I now can put into words but I was not able to articulate at the time. It's given me a deep appreciation for, for example the guy that road raged me.

Men, in your orbit there are countless men right now who are feeling the emotions that you felt, have the same questions that you had in those days leading up to your own moment of making the most important decision of your life, and then in the days after, as well. Do you remember what that was like? Let's take a look at the passage today and see if we can just put ourselves in the place of those men.

WE ARE ALL EQUALLY UNWORTHY

The first thing we're going to talk about this morning is how we are all equally unworthy. Romans chapter 3:21 says this, "But now, apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the law and the prophets testify." I'm reminded every time I read this passage about how Jesus walking on the road to Emmaus with the two disciples went through all of the law and the prophets talking about how they testified about Jesus. Verse 22, "This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile."

Then, with regard to this first point that we are all equal unworthy verse 23 says, famously, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." In other words, apart from the righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus Christ everybody is stuck. Everybody is capable of being a road rager. Everybody is

confused. Everybody is clueless. Very few people are even able to articulate what it is that's bothering them so much.

The first thing for us to understand is that nothing we can do will ever make us good enough for God to love us, because we're all sinners and separated from Him, falling short of His glory. So, the application that I want to make in this particular part of the talk is this. Just to remember that we can have empathy for men like the road rager, or men who are depressed, or men who are acting out in various ways, because we, just like them we are equally unworthy. We all fall short. Even now, after we have Christ we still fall short. This idea of just putting ourselves back into their shoes, instead of having the, let's just call it the pride of the Pharisees because, perhaps, maybe we're not doing some of the same things that they're doing now, but just remembering this point, that we are all beggars. We all have at some point been stuck, and by making the most important decision a man can ever make that's how we get unstuck. A lot of men just don't really know that, and so for us to really have empathy for these men.

That brings us to the Big Idea for the day. It comes actually from a saying of D.T. Niles, who lived in the first part of the 20th century. He was from Sri Lanka, and he was a very famous Methodist. He was the head of the Methodist church in that country, but he was also very involved in evangelism around the world. So, to paraphrase what his famous statements, **"Sharing the gospel is one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread."** That's the point of this that I take away from this 23rd verse here that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

WHAT MAKES A MAN RIGHT WITH GOD?

The second thing, then, for us to talk about is what makes a man right with God? This passage is one of the summits of the entire Bible because it does explain the gospel. Again, verse 22 says, "This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Then, in verse 24, and this is how we're made right with God, "And all are justified freely by His grace." Just a good reminder that grace means unmerited favor. It's the kind of love that a father has for the child he has created, without respect to the behavior of the child. It's just this unmerited favor, unmerited favor. So, we are justified. Justified is a Bible word. It has its own nuance but, essentially, it means salvation.

All are saved freely by His grace, or justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by their own efforts? No. That came by keeping the law? No. That came by doing good works? No. That came because I'm basically a good person, I'm really a good person in my heart? No. That came by Christ Jesus. Now these words, redemption, justified, and in the next verse, atonement, reminds me that there is a sentence, or a statement, or an idea, that was made by Gregory The Great that I'll adapt a little bit. He talked about, and this is the paraphrase, he talked about that the Bible is a river shallow enough for children to wade, but deep enough for elephants to swim. I would add also deep enough for a few theologians to drown.

So, there is some complexity, some nuance, to this gospel that we're not going to get in today that would require further study. In other words, an entire talk on just atonement, for example, would be in order. We're talking about all of these things and the bundle that forms together to make this the most important decision that you could ever make. Reading on in verse 25, God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, and everybody kind of has an understanding of what it means to atone for one's sins, or to make up for one's sins, but Christ is that atonement. God presented Christ as the sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of His blood to be received by faith.

Now we're getting right at the heart of the gospel. This is the bread that men need to eat. If you have tasted this bread you know that this is the thing that satisfied this deep hunger, this hunger that we have, this ache that we have, it's almost ... These men that are out there that don't know God yet, the ache that they have, I figured this out when I was reminiscing, it was very akin to the ache that you

might have for a girl when you're a sophomore and you're sitting behind this Junior girl, and she has this beautiful long hair, and she has this way of walking. You know that you'll never be able to even have her look your way but you have this puppy love going on. It's that kind of an ache that men have to find, first of all, a way to get some power to do what they want to do, what they know they need to do, but then also to find that sense of meaning and purpose for their lives.

Notice who does this work of making us right with God. Verse 25, it says, "God presented Christ." Verse 26, "He is the one who justifies. God is the one who does this work, that's why we call it unmerited favor. Application here for us is that once we fully understand that the most important decision we ever make will be made because God is the one who made it possible, then it releases us to put our faith in Him. Our part is having faith. God's part is everything else. He's even the One who allows us to put our faith in Him. Ephesians chapter 2:4 and 5, "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us has made us alive in Christ. He has forgiven our transgressions. It is by faith that you are saved."

The other application here is to remember that there are men all around you in your orbit who have not made this most important decision yet, who need to know that God has this grace that is available if they will put their faith in Jesus. The Big Idea today, sharing the gospel is one beggar, you or me, telling another beggar where he found bread.

HOW DOES GOD WANT YOU TO RESPOND?

Final thing I want us to talk about today is how does God want you to respond? Verse 27, "Where then is boasting? It is excluded." When we understand that we are all equally unworthy, that we are all beggars, then we have no sense of superiority that we've done anything to earn our salvation, that it does come to us as a gift. He goes on, "Where then is boasting? It is excluded, ..." because of what law? The law that requires works? No. "... because of the law that requires faith. For we maintain that a person is justified by faith, apart from works, apart from the works of the law." This is really the one idea that fully understood, and truly believed, can really change everything for the men that you come in contact with, or maybe even yourself if you're the one who is needing to taste this bread of life.

Verse 29, "Or is God the God of Jews only, is he not the God of Gentiles, too? Yes, of Gentiles, too. Since there is only one God who will justify the circumcised by faith, and the uncircumcised through that same faith, do we then nullify the law by this faith? Not at all. Rather we uphold the law." With regard to how God wants us to respond, the first thing I think He wants us to do is to remember how clueless we were, to from time to time look back and reflect, reminisce, feel the ache, feel the confusion, feel the frustration so that we can have empathy for other men.

Two weekends ago I was hiking and camping in the North Georgia mountains, hiking Blood Mountain. On Sunday morning I hooked our trailer up to our truck to come back home, and just as I was getting ready to pull out of the campground I noticed that the tire pressure monitoring system showed that the front left tire of the truck had deflated to 23 pounds. Fortunately, I have a portable air compressor since I'm managing 10 tires. I filled it back up to about 40 pounds, and then I thought to myself, "Well, it's about two hours to the Atlanta area and I know there'll be some tire stores open there where I can get the tire fixed. So then I, with great trepidation, pulled out of the camp ground and kept watching the tire pressure monitor. Fortunately, I only lost three pounds of pressure in two hours. I finally arrived at a tire store, and they had a long wait.

So, I went to another tire store and they had a long wait, but one of the men said to me, "Well, let me just take a look at that for you." He was just really nice, he came out. His name was Mark. He came out, he took a look, and then he asked, "Do you have a spare tire?" I said, "Yeah, I've got a good spare." He said, "It's not one of those run flats is it?" I said, "No, no, it's a full spare." He said, "Well, you know, we don't have time to fix the tire but maybe we could put your spare on if you'd like." I said, "Oh, that

would be awesome," because I really would like to get back home to Orlando." That's exactly what we proceeded to do.

They wanted to engage about tires, and so I started talking to them about my experience with this tire. Then, one thing led to another and we started talking about life in general. I told them that I wrote books for a living, and they were interested in that, and they wanted to know what kind of books. So, I said, "Well, I write books for men just like you to help them find meaning and purpose in life." One thing led to another and I ended up giving four men at this tire store a copy of the book, *The Man in the Mirror*, and signed it for them, Mark, Jonathan, Ellis, and Mace.

Then, I got back on the road and I realized that these were men just like me who were, and I don't know exactly where each of them were on their life, but they were anxious to find meaning and purpose in their lives. They were looking, they were hungry, for the information that I explained was in this book. So, I was just riding down the road, giving glory to God and thanking Him for the opportunity for this four-book flat, this opportunity to share the food that I had found as a beggar myself with others. But the story's not over. I got home and I still had to get this flat fixed, right? So, I go into the local tire store and I strike up a conversation with the manager. He starts the conversation by talking about all the negative things that are going on in the world. I pointed out, too, I said, "Well, you know, actually the world's a much better place than it's ever been before." He said, "What are you talking about?" I talked to him a little bit about Steven Pinker's book about how he has these seventy-five graphs showing that basically every area of life is better than it was a hundred years ago, from mortality rates, to house sizes to, everything is much better, basically.

That led to a spiritual conversation. Then he said to me, he said, "You know, ..." he said, "My mother is older now, and she's a Christian, and she said to me, and has said to me many times, ..." she said, "I'll just call him Dave, it's not his real name, "Dave, I really want you to be baptized before I die." I said, "Well, where do you stand on that? What do you think?" I said, "Are you for it, against it, or are you kind of on the fence?" He said, "Well, you know, I want to believe, I would like to believe, but I just have a lot of questions." So, we talked for 45 minutes.

The upshot of that is that I ended up giving him a copy of *The Man in the Mirror*, as well, and signed it for him, and the Christian man, too, and signing that for him. So, I had a six-book flat as it turned out, and hopefully we're going to get together for a cup of coffee here and talk further in the near future. Again, the Big Idea today is **"Sharing the gospel is one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread."** It's easy to do. The other decision, and I hope you will make that decision to be that person who shares the bread that you found yourself with others. The other decision is maybe you are the man who has yet to taste the bread. If that's you, and you are ready to do that, would like to do that, maybe you are the road rager, maybe you're the tire changer, maybe you own a business, whatever your life situation is, maybe you're the man who is ready to taste that bread.

As we close I want to have a prayer, and whether you are already a believer, or would like to become a believer for the first time, so whether you want to affirm, or reaffirm, your faith in Jesus Christ, this is the most important decision a man can ever make, that you can ever make, that I can ever make. So, let me just invite you to pray with me and put your faith, or reaffirm your faith, in Jesus for the reception of His grace and salvation, to be justified, His redemption through His atonement. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, I need you. I am confused. I am frustrated. My emotions go all over the place because I'm looking for the true meaning of life. I'm also looking for eternal life, if there is such a thing, and the Bible says there is. So, Jesus, I acknowledge and confess that I am one of those men who are equally unworthy because I am a sinner. I ask you to forgive my sins because of your great mercy, and the great love with which you have loved me, and make me alive in Christ. Give me the gift of eternal life. Show me the reason that you have made me. I thank you that you've heard my prayer, my prayer of faith, and that you have come into my life. I pray that, as I have tasted the bread of life that you would show me

everything else I need to know in order to grow as a disciple, and then to help other men also find this bread, knowing that sharing the gospel is one beggar showing another beggar where he found bread. I ask this in your name, Jesus, amen.

Men, if you have prayed this prayer, and it's been the first time that you've ever received faith drop me an email, patrickmorley@maninthemirror.org. Then, let me send you some additional materials to help you start growing in your faith. Thank you, men.