

23rd August 2020 10 am Our Need for the Gospel

Reading by Lindsey Attwood, talk by Andrew Attwood,
This transcript is only of the reading and talk

Reading: Romans 3:21-26 [NIVUK 1984]

[Lindsey Attwood:]

²¹ But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—²⁶ 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.

Talk (including reading of Luke 16:19-31 among other passages)

So I just want to pray as Andrew comes to talk to us. And this morning, I just want to pray that God blesses him, and He speaks through him.

So Father, God, I pray for Andrew, as he talks to us, I ask that You would anoint him with your Spirit, that You would give him the words to say that bring life to all of us. So we just ask this in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

[Andrew Attwood:]

Thank you Lindsey.

Good to see you all.

What a morning! Technical hitches [The livestream was delayed by 10 minutes]! Little did I know that we were going to be needing some prayer this morning. I just alerted a few friends this morning saying, "Would you pray? My talk might be important today, so do pray." So you never know what's going on sometimes behind the scenes.

I wanted to, before I even begin, just say a quick thank-you for the different groups that have been running services during the early part of August. So a big thank you for that. It does make a difference to people who are normally in front of the camera at this time. So we can have a little bit of a gap, a little bit of a break, and Lindsey and I certainly benefited from some time away. So big thank you for that.

We are going to be heading into a very important teaching series over the next month or two. It's going to be focusing, as Lindsey said, on the Gospel message itself. And today I wanted to talk about our understanding of the need for the Gospel and what Jesus said about that, so that we can understand, believe, and then learn to share it more effectively. You may ask the question, "Why now? Why do we need to be talking about something that presumably we already know?" Well, I think we do live in an age where Christianity is not only marginalised, but I would even go as far as saying some Christians may sometimes lose focus on what our primary message is. As you know, throughout lockdown, I've been encouraging people to know God more deeply, to draw near to Him, to know that we are the objects of His love. And it seems to me that it would be a perfect development on from that, to go deeper into an understanding of what His Gospel is.

But there's a thing about the Gospel, to really understand the wonder and the splendour of the Good News, you have to begin elsewhere. First, I just want to show you a slide. This is a slide with a particular word on it. The slide depicts a famous painting by an artist called Caravaggio. And Caravaggio was one of many painters who use the technique called chiaroscuro. And the purpose of this technique was to heighten the brightness by increasing darker areas. It's a highly contrasting way of painting to make drama more obvious in the image. What I wanted to do this morning, with regards to my talk, is to throw into sharp contrast the Gospel by talking about our need for it.



You see, ordinarily there's a strong emphasis, particularly in the West, on the therapeutic benefit of knowing Jesus in the presence of His love, of His peace and His grace in our lives and His ability to heal and restore. All of those things are true and fundamental to the Christian message. But there is a deeper message that we need to be attached to and founded on before we can really even enter properly, even into those. It's something deeper that we need to understand. Now, to the surprise of many Western Christians you see, when Jesus appeared, He spoke very much in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets. He is the ultimate prophet, the prophet with a capital P. And He picked up a particular ministry that they had.

Let me describe to you one of the key roles of Old Testament prophets. They arose through the history of Israel to call Israel back to obedience, away from idolatry, and also to pronounce judgement when Israel refused to listen. They were a voice like John the Baptist calling in the wilderness, calling people back to God. It was to do with the call back, because God is good. God is true God, God is holy, God is just. And so I wanted to begin this particular talk with an emphasis on God's justice. Imagine for a moment that you've got two young children, maybe a 5-year-old and a 7-year-old, and you offer them on a plate, a slice of cake each, one slice though, one is significantly bigger than the other slice. And the kid who gets the big slice is absolutely delighted. And the kid who has the smallest slice is furious. "Unjust! It's not fair!" Even little humans, even children understand unfairness. Deep in our bones, we have a simple understanding of justice and of unjust things in the world. Much more recently, we've had our news and media flooded by protests and pictures of young people upset about A level results. There's been a whole heap of things going on in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and finally, belatedly, in England, where ministers and politicians have had to revise what they were going to say and do about results that were clearly not fair. And we had young people saying, "This isn't on! This is not fair! This is unjust!" You see, justice is a fundamental thing to us as human beings, because we are made in the image of God. And so it is, that we need to look at the God of justice.

Now, I want to encourage you during this talk, if you have a piece of paper and a pen, make notes of some of the Scriptures that I'm going to write down in and I'm going to reference quite a number and it will be good for you to keep note of this, so you don't just think this is just Andrew's opinion, this is what it says in the Bible. So the first reference is all the way back to Leviticus: Leviticus 19, verse 15, it says this,

Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly.

Very clear, very blunt speaking, very easy to understand.

Psalm 37, verses 27 to 29 says this:

²⁷ Turn from evil and do good;
then you will dwell in the land for ever.

²⁸ For the LORD loves the just
and will not forsake his faithful ones.

Wrongdoers will be completely destroyed[a];
the offspring of the wicked will perish.

²⁹ The righteous will inherit the land
and dwell in it for ever.

Two more just quick references: Isaiah 61 verse 8 says this:

‘For I, the LORD, love justice;
I hate robbery and wrongdoing.
In my faithfulness I will reward my people
and make an everlasting covenant with them.

I think the scariest one for me is Proverbs 21 verse 15. It says this:

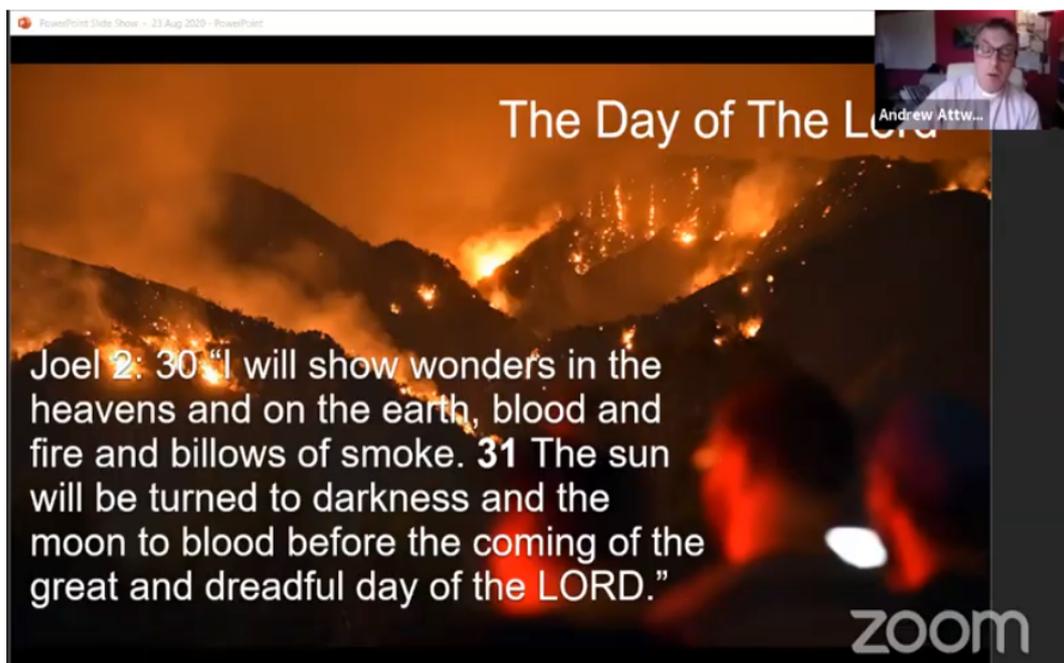
When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous
but terror to evildoers.

Let me tell you a personal story, something that happened to me during this summer. We went up to Leeds to get Lizzie when we had to bring her back because of lockdown. She'd been studying at Leeds. And so Lindsey and I, we kind of filled the car and brought her all the way home. And about a week and a half later, I get a letter in the post, saying that I'd been caught speeding on the way home (I'm confessing to the church). I got caught speeding and I got the usual invitation, saying it's going to be so many points on your licence, or you've got to do this speed awareness course. And as we all know, it's impossible to meet these days. So I had to do a speed awareness course online, with about eight other people; that was probably mid-July, I had to do that. It was it was intriguing to kind-of log in to something, feeling guilty as anything even though if I'm honest, I hadn't noticed that I was going over the speed over the speed limit. I was in this Zoom call, with about eight other people, all kind of staring at our boots, wishing we weren't there, having to be there for two hours, learning how to drive safely on the motorway. It's a fair cop. I broke the law, and I had to do something as a result, justice had to be done. I didn't like it. I didn't feel like it. But it was appropriate. I mean, interestingly, even Lindsey and I (she was in the passenger seat), we still can't figure out when it happened. But it must have just happened without us noticing, which means that justice is applied even when you're not aware of it.

Justice in the Old Testament is a significant theme that develops and develops and gets increasingly serious. I want to talk to you about a phrase called the Day of the Lord. I've got a picture to show you about the Day of the Lord.

By the time you get to the end of the Old Testament, there are two prophets, Joel and Zechariah, who mention the day of the Lord more than anybody else. Joel says this in Joel 2 verse 30. He says:

- ³⁰ I will show wonders in the heavens
and on the earth,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
- ³¹ The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.



This expression 'Day of the Lord' occurs 18 times in the Old Testament. Most often in those two books I've mentioned, Joel and Zechariah actually, and it's interesting that even more than that, 208 times in the Old Testament, prophets say, 'in that day', 'in that day', 'God will do in that day', 'God will do'. So there's something really important about understanding that the God of justice was actually always going to have to build to a crescendo, where He put everything right.

The people of Israel realised that they knew that they were accountable to God for their behaviours, and that's why they would often have to go into exile. They were always quite keen to hear the prophets speak damning words about the other nations that were wicked, but were a little nervous when the judgement of God came near the people of God. So when we think "Yeah! God is going to do justice!" the problem is He's just about everything, including ourselves.

Often we rejoice over good and obvious justice. You know, when Harvey Weinstein was convicted this year, you've got a media mogul, who was a man of great power and influence, but clearly was gradually exposed as someone who was an abuser, a sexual abuser of women. And this year in court, he was sentenced to 23 years for his crimes. And who knows, there may be other other things that are added to that, because his behaviour was repeated over a number of years. We kind of go, "Good! That's right!" But how do we feel about God's justice for everybody? How do we feel about the idea of God being a God of justice, for us too? Let me read you one more Old Testament passage, make a note of this one, Amos 5, verse 18. It says this:

Woe to you who long
for the day of the LORD!
Why do you long for the day of the LORD?
That day will be darkness, not light.

You may be thinking, "This is a bit of a miserable talk!" I'm not going to apologise for this. Like I said earlier, if we want to see the brightness of the Gospel, we've got to see the darkness of the problem.

Now, the scale of the problem is something that we have usually lost sight of. Back in the time of Jesus, Israel tended to think that the big problem was the Romans. And so their expectation of a Messiah was rescue from the Romans. Today, what would we say our biggest problem is? Well, apart from COVID, apart from political unrest, many people might say, for example, climate change. Climate change is clearly globally the biggest problem, but you know what? Neither the Romans, nor even climate change are the biggest problems. You see, according to the Bible, sin, and separation from God, are the ultimate big problems, by a huge, huge margin. Why were the Romans there in the first place? Because of sin. Why does climate change happen? Because of sin. Until you address the big problem, you never, ever get to tackle these other problems, even though they need our attention.

So anyway, we now know the background to the story. Some of you might be going, "Ah, can't we just get to Jesus? Can't we get to our loving Saviour, the one who's going to give us some Good News? I need to get to Jesus now!" But we need to hear from Jesus the prophet first. Because Jesus the prophet speaks similar things to Old Testament prophets, using sometimes even sharper language. Here's another couple of passages to jot down, for you to read in your own time.

Matthew 24:42-44 describes the end of this age, when He will return and He says, "It will come like a thief in the night. Will you be ready?"

Matthew 25:1-13. He tells this enigmatic parable about wise and foolish virgins. And these foolish virgins run off to go and get themselves some oil at the last minute because the bridegroom has come when they didn't expect him and the doors are locked. And they knock on the door, wanting to get in. And the master of the house says, "I do not know you." These are harsh, dramatic words from Jesus Himself. Now, of course, we're Christians: we say that we're followers of Jesus Christ. So because we're followers of Jesus Christ, we need to listen to what He says.

Let me now give you some more words from Jesus, John 3:18, just after those famous verses about 'God So Loved the World', John 3:18 says this:

Whoever believes in him (in Christ)
is not condemned, (Good News)
but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed
in the name of God's one and only Son.

According to John 3:18, everybody who doesn't believe in Him is already condemned.

Let me go on with another reference from John's Gospel: again, Jesus' words, John 12:48. He says this:

There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day.

Jesus is beginning to refer to a day of judgement. This is Jesus the Prophet.

When Jesus sent out the 12, He was talking about their efforts and their success to share the Good News of the kingdom of God. But He also said some warnings for people who didn't respond. Matthew 10:14-15. He says this,

¹⁴ If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgement than for that town.

How do you react to all of this? How do you respond to this set of teachings? I sometimes think to myself, these are the bits in the Bible that we skip. These are the bits in the Bible that we really don't want to hear.

But it kind of gets even more pointy. Some of you may have Bibles with you and I just want to encourage you to turn to Luke 16 with me, Luke 16. We're going to read from verse 19, and we're going to share with you a parable that Jesus told that describes in even more detail His picture of how things are at the end of the age. Luke 16, beginning verse 19 [NIVUK 1984], says this:

¹⁹ 'There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

²² 'The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire."

²⁵ 'But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us."

²⁷ 'He answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment."

²⁹ 'Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them."

³⁰ "'No, father Abraham," he said, "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent."

³¹ 'He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

That's a horror story - from Jesus! That's a horror story, describing the implacable stubborn nature of people who refuse to respond to God in life, and still aren't really repentant, even after death. But think of how Jesus described the context for this rich man after he was dead. I don't even need to go into descriptions of it, it speaks for itself.

Now, some of you may be recoiling from this idea, this idea of mentioning the 'H' word, 'Hell'. Jesus mentioned it. Is it just? I talked to you about God being a God of justice earlier - is it just that God would send people away in such appalling separation? Well, let me give you another illustration. We've got another picture here to show you. I wanted to show you an illustration I got from a movie I watched a while ago, which was called Christ crucified. And it was trying to explain why our sinfulness and our selfishness is such a big deal.

Imagine for a moment that you're looking at a set of cars in a junkyard. Imagine that you're walking through a junkyard and there's cars piled high and you

happen to be walking past a car and maybe with with a coin or a key, you kind of scratch or scrape down the side of a car, a car in the junkyard. But does that matter? Probably not. My guess is those cars are going to be scrapped completely. They're not going to have a great value. So, you know, you're not really going to kind of incur any kind of wrath from the owner of the scrapyard because all of these cars are worthless anyway. So just imagine that, you kind of walk through there.



But then imagine that you walk out of the scrapyard and you go down the road. And you come to a new-car showroom. Another picture to show you: in this showroom, it's the most expensive Ferraris you could ever have dreamed of. Imagine the most expensive Ferrari in the world is in there. And you decide to have a wander around the car showroom. And imagine again, this time by accident,



you scratch the side of the most expensive Ferrari. Is that a problem? Absolutely it is. Ferraris like this cost something like £400,000, sometimes £500,000. Scratching the junkyard one: no problem. Scratching this: big problem!

You may remember back to some of the Psalms, there's a time when David has sinned: he's sinned against Bathsheba and her husband and he writes a famous Psalm in repentance for what he's done, and in that Psalm, he says, "Against you, O Lord, have I sinned." What David knows is the kind of trivial stuff that we kind of do to each other, or even the serious stuff that we do to each other, is actually against God. Because of who God is, completely holy, completely good, completely just, the consequences are higher. It's not like wandering through a junkyard and it doesn't matter. We are made in the image of God, offending a perfect God, offending the most Holy of Holies. And so the consequences are severe. The cost is much, much higher.

I'm just going to kind-of make this point finally and clearly now to show you how dark things really are, according to Jesus. These are verses for you to jot down and then I'll read you some more. Jot down Matthew 5, verse 30, Matthew 13:40, Matthew 23:15, I could go on and on but I'm going to read to you now, from Matthew 13:42. This is what he says in this verse:

They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

This is Jesus speaking. Matthew 25 verse 41:

‘Then he will say to those on his left, (the parable of the sheep and the goats) “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”’

I don't know about you. But the first time I came across this, it was a surprise to me that Jesus spoke about judgement and Hell more than anybody else in the whole Bible. Our Saviour spoke more about judgement and Hell, more than anybody else in the whole Bible. But you know what, even though these are the most vivid phrases, there is a picture that the Bible gives us that is even more vivid than this. So let's see this next picture, because this is the biggest, most clear picture we have of Hell, and we're very familiar with it. Some of us may even wear this round their necks. When Lindsey sat down, she had a cross round her neck. The worst picture we have in the Bible of Hell is this: the Son of God who chose to come to Earth to be agonisingly tortured, and terribly separated from His Father, because of our wrongdoing. This is what Hell looks like. This is what Hell is. This is what He saves us from. This is why the Gospel is bright light against a very, very dark background.



So just dwell on that for a moment. We are already familiar with a picture of Hell, because it's also a picture of Heaven and salvation.

Let me move towards the end of what I want to say today now, because I wanted to emphasise this as an important kind of climax to the end of this age. The next picture I have for you is a picture that describes Jesus in John 5:22 because Jesus describes Himself in John 5:22 as the judge. More than once, in fact, in John's Gospel, Jesus is designated the judge and the letters of the New Testament designate Him as the judge.



John 3:36 says this:

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

Jesus recognises that we are creatures under the rejection of God - unless we choose Him. Wrath remains on us unless we choose Him, and, back to Romans, Romans 6:23 says this:

For the wages of sin is death, (That's the consequences of sin.)
but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is a pretty harsh, difficult talk. I don't know whether you want to tune in or tune out or stay with it? If you're a Christian, I want you to hold on to this, because if you hear this, it will make you more acutely appreciative of how good the Gospel of Jesus is.

So who can stand before a holy God? Who can stand before a holy judge? No one. No one. Not even on our best day. I just wanted to say to you that I know I am utterly lost. And I can't save myself. I also want to say this to you. You may not like to hear the idea of a day of judgement. There may be a kind of, "Let's just get back to some therapeutic Christianity please." Whether you believe it or not, it's going to happen. It is inevitable, because God has spoken multiple times, and Jesus Himself has said it, this is going to happen.

So in the light of that, let's have a look at our last slide. I don't know about you, but I know I need a saviour. I know I need rescuing.

A few summers ago we were holidaying in France. And we were at the beach. And there were waves crashing, and on at least two occasions, Lindsey and Emily nearly got dragged out. And others had to pull them back. And they were terrified. They were absolutely terrified. They needed saving.



I wanted to ask you this question this morning. To what extent do you know that you need saving?

If you're a Christian, you are already saved. But to what extent do you understand that?

It may be that you're not thinking of yourself at this moment.

You may be thinking of friends, or perhaps relatives, knowing that the clock is ticking towards the final day.

Maybe as we hear the dark side of reality, the brightness of the Gospel begins to compel us in a fresh way, to want to share this message, to share the Good News, because the consequences are so big.

So let's have a moment of prayer. Let's finish now with some praying. Let's be quiet for a moment.

Lord Jesus, we want to thank You for the truth of the Bible.

It doesn't pull its punches. It doesn't hide things from us. It spells out how things really are.

I want to pray, Lord Jesus, that You would give us the courage to hear the truth.

To hear the truth about what the big problem is.

And that because You are a God of justice, You will deal with it.

Lord, as we head into this series where we get to study, and enjoy and celebrate the Gospel, the Good News, we pray that it would shine brighter and brighter and brighter in our hearts, so that we can come to celebrate and enjoy and share in the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Let's just have a moment of quiet.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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