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 Sermon
 January 5th, Christmas 2

To Him who was in the beginning with God, and without Him nothing was made that was made, that light which shines in the darkness, to Him be eternal praise! AMEN!!!

The Word of the LORD which forms a portion for our sermon text this morning comes to us from Romans chapter 3, verses 19-22:

Now we know that whatever the law says is addressed to those who are under the law, so that every mouth will be silenced and the whole world will be subject to God's judgment. 20 For this reason, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by works of the law, for through the law we become aware of sin. 21 But now, completely apart from the law, a righteousness from God has been made known. The Law and the Prophets testify to it. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all and over all who believe.

This is the Word of The LORD!!! The congregation may be seated...

Mercy, Grace, and Peace ARE YOURS from your God and Father and from your Savior from sin, Jesus Christ. Dear fellow Redeemed...

What did you do last year? What did you do last decade? Last Wednesday, we flipped the calendar over and ventured into a new year and also went into a new decade! New Year is a nice holiday and it is one that is pretty unique. It is a holiday that not only looks back but also looks forward.

So, what did you do in 2019? Maybe you had some kind of video pop up on your social media feed that automatically compiled a series of photos or posts to show you your year in review. It's like a highlight reel of your year. This can be a good way to remind you of what you accomplished in the previous 365 days. We do all kinds of things on our planet's trip around the sun. There are many different things that we do, and there are many different things that are done for us or to us. Some of these deeds we fondly remember. Other deeds we would rather forget or even pretend that they never happened at all. The good things often produce audible responses, such as joyful exclamations. But the bad things that happen often

leave us speechless and unable to express our feelings.

God's Word also does a similar thing. When we see the Law, and how hopeless we are to do the things that it requires, we shouldn't have much to say. But then, when we see the glorious hope that the Gospel gives us, we shout for joy! In our text this morning, we will see the audible effects which the two great teachings of Holy Scripture produce. The Law truly stuns sinners into silence, but the truth that is the Gospel overwhelms us into praise.

And so we pray:
 O LORD, SANCTIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH, YOUR WORD IS TRUTH, AMEN!

Now we know that whatever the law says is addressed to those who are under the law, so that every mouth will be silenced and the whole world will be subject to God's judgment. 20 For this reason, no one will be declared righteous in his

sight by works of the law, for through the law we become aware of sin.

Paul's letter to the Romans is textbook when it comes to the great teachings of God's Word, that is, Law and Gospel. Throughout the previous sections of this book, the Law is thoroughly highlighted and its implications are drawn out. Here in this text, we have the summation of what the Law means and the effect which it produces. The conclusion is not a happy one, quite the opposite. For those who are under the Law, they have the verdict of GUILTY stamped on them. Who then is under the law? Everyone. All flesh. That means you and it means me.

Paul went through painstaking detail in the previous sections to show that both Jew and Gentile alike are under this same law, and therefore are under the same condemnation of the law. The Jews, who aspired to keep the Law, failed it do so. The Gentiles, who might have been oblivious to the Law, were also guilty of it. Paul states in the previous chapter of Romans, **Indeed, all people who have sinned without law will also perish without law, and all the people who have sinned in connection with law will be judged by law. 13 For it is not those who hear the law who will be righteous in God's sight, but those who do the law who will be declared righteous.**

This truth that Paul brings out here is for every ear to hear. What he is talking about applies to everyone. Everyone, by definition, means you! This applies to you and to me as well. We have heard the Law. We know the Ten Commandments. We know what they say, and we know that we do not do that which they command. This means that we will also be judged by the law. Even if you didn't know that law, you would still be judged by it.

Imagine for a moment, that you committed a crime. For sake of argument, let's say you walked into a store and attempted to steal a computer. Then you get caught and arrested. You go to court, and you stand before a judge. When the judge asks you why you did what you did, you offer this as your argument: "Your Honor, I did not know that stealing was against the law. There were no signs at the store that said I

couldn't steal. I did not know that taking a computer without paying for it was against the law." What would that judge say to you? Do you think that the judge would say, "Oh, you didn't know! This changes everything. Well, in that case, you are not guilty! Case dismissed, you are free to go"? Of course not! This would not go over well! He would see how ridiculous of an argument that was and even if you didn't know that stealing was wrong, you would still be guilty and have to bear the consequences of the crime you committed. Don't do the crime if you can't serve the time!

The same is true about God's law. Ignorance is not an excuse. Not only that, but we all have the law written in our hearts. That is another reason the "I didn't know it was against the law" argument is ludicrous. The natural knowledge of God is inside everyone. Everyone knows it is wrong to steal, so that argument is completely absurd. Some may dull their conscience to wear down that knowledge, but it is still there inside all of us.

What is devastating is finding out just how many different ways and the extent to which you have broken the law. The more you learn about it, the more you see how guilty you truly are. Just think about the last year alone. How many times did you sin? There may be specific sins that jump to mind, but even they are only the tiniest tip of the sin iceberg. How many sins did you commit last year that you have forgotten already? What about all those sins that you committed that you didn't even realize in the moment were sinning? How many sins a year? What about all the sins you committed in the 2010s? What about your entire lifetime? Is there even a number that we could calculate?

When confronted with this haunting truth, we have a few different ways we can respond. We like to think we can talk our way out of them. "Someone else is responsible for the wrong that I did! It wasn't my fault!" That famous Flip Wilson line is often used as an excuse: "The Devil made me do it!" We like to play the blame game because it shifts responsibility away from us. This passing of the buck is in our sinful human nature. It was on full display the first time man sinned.

Adam argued, “The woman YOU gave me GOD, she gave me and I ate!” Eve argued, “The SERPENT, he deceived me, and I ate...” Humans will blame everyone and anyone to get the guilt of sin off of them.

But Paul plainly here says that is simply not going to cut it! **Now we know that whatever the law says is addressed to those who are under the law, so that every mouth will be silenced and the whole world will be subject to God’s judgment.**

They say that talk is cheap. This time of year may be the best time to witness that fact. People love to make New Year resolutions. “This year I am going to be better! This year I am going to work out and lose 20 pounds.” How quickly those resolutions fade! We are only 5 days into the new year, I wonder how many resolutions have been broken already...

But a resolution to not break the law is not something that is attempted voluntarily. It’s not a suggestion, rather it is a demand. Be Holy, for I the LORD your God am Holy! Be Holy or else! That is what the Law clearly commands!

And we are not. So what is your excuse? Well, we can blame others until we are blue in the face, but not only will that not work, it’s also not true. The Law shows us our sins. What is the audible response to the Law? It is the sound of silence! **every mouth will be silenced** There is nothing to say when we are guilty! We didn’t do what is required. Instead, we went against the Law and did things it strickly, in the bluntest terms, forbade! What is the resulting punishment for doing what we did going to be? Paul makes that plain too: **For this reason, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by works of the law, for through the law we become aware of sin.**

New Year is a time of new beginnings. In one of my favorite movies, there is a scene that takes place during New Year’s Eve. When the ball is dropping on the TV, one character says to another, “Don’t you just love New Year? You get to start all over?”

What about us? Do we get a chance to start all over with God? Do you have an opportunity to be declared righteous? What if you got a chance to actually make a New Years resolution with God? What if God came

to you on New Year’s Eve and said, “OK, if you can go the whole year without sinning, then we’re square and I will declare you to be righteous”? How long do you reckon you would make it? Could you make it to 2021? Could you make it to February? The next week? The next day? The next minute?

Heres what the Bible says about us. In the verses leading up to this our text, Paul quotes from the Bible, **There is no one who is righteous, not even one. 11 There is no one who understands. There is no one who searches for God. 12 They all turned away; together they became useless. There is no one who does what is good; there is not even one.**

THERE IS NONE WHO IS RIGHTEOUS!!! We are altogether corrupt. There is no good in us, not even in the best of us. Apart from the help of God, there is no way we could keep the Law even a little. This fact should stun us, sinners, into complete silence!

But now the sound silence is replaced by shouts of praise! This text is the turning point in the letter to the Romans. It starts by painstakingly showing us that we have no excuse, nothing to say to the fact that we are condemned under the Law. But then it transitions into these beautiful facts: **But now, completely apart from the law, a righteousness from God has been made known. The Law and the Prophets testify to it. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all and over all who believe.**

Before Jesus, our equation with God was not a happy one. It was US + OUR SIN = eternal hell. But then Jesus came along and changed everything forever! It now stands the US + OUR SIN - CHRIST’S perfect life and innocent death = eternal life in heaven! In fact, that metaphor doesn’t even do it justice, because when Jesus came, it took us out of the equation entirely!

But now, completely apart from the law, a righteousness from God has been made known. The Law and the Prophets testify to it.

Track what Paul says here. Righteousness from God has now been made know. This Righteousness, which once again is from God, is completely apart

from the Law. Yet, it is testified by the Law, and the Prophets as well. What exactly is Paul saying here?

Well, it's two different uses of the word law. The Law and the Prophets refers to scripture, which testifies to the righteousness of God. Sometimes this clause gets translated **righteousness of God**, but I like how this translation renders it **righteousness from God**. Certainly, God is righteous, He is Holy. But that is not what Paul is talking about here. While the righteousness to which Paul is referring originates from God, it belongs to someone else. This righteousness is completely apart from the Ten Commandments. Just who's righteousness is then Paul talking about? He is talking about YOUR righteousness!!!

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all and over all who believe.

How are we righteous? Clearly, we aren't, as Paul pointed out. And yet we are. How? Because SOMEONE ELSE gave us HIS righteousness. *Jesus Christ the Righteous* is righteous before God and is God and is even our own righteousness! This is incredible! How do we receive this righteousness? Simple, believing that Jesus is your Savior. Who is eligible for this life-saving faith? To everyone! Everyone, by definition, means you! The righteousness needed to stand before God comes from God. It is found in the blood of Jesus Christ. This righteousness is to all, that is to everybody who has ever lived!

Yet, this doesn't mean that everyone who has ever lived will be righteous before God. The opportunity is certainly there. But some want to talk themselves up and say, "I am a good person, look at all the good things I have done!" That desire to earn salvation is at the core of every false religion or belief. But what it really says is that the person wants to justify themselves by looking at the Law in some way or another. But the real truth is that the Law saves no one, it only and always condemns. It shows us our sin. We see it, and we know there is nothing left to say. The only right audible response to seeing the Law is

the one the tax collector had in the parable Jesus told: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

Imagine again that you are standing before a Judge. Not an earthly judge, but rather the Maker of Heaven and Earth. Your case comes before the LORD of Hosts. The prosecution, a cutthroat attorney named Satan, reads the proof of your sin. How long would it take for all the charges to be read? All those uncountable sins... The sins that you didn't even realize you committed, the secret sins that no one else you thought knew about, those sins you have long forgotten about are read aloud, they are ALL presented. What defense could you possibly make?

This is not a fictional scenario. This is reality. But there's another reality as well. Your defense is not up to you! You don't have to face your Judge alone, you have a lawyer, you have an advocate! This is not some court order public servant, rather it is the suffering servant, the Messiah, Jesus! He is your advocate by faith! He submits before the court new evidence, something that changes everything! He presents before the Judge the case that He has paid for all of those uncountable sins by coming to earth, living a perfect life under those laws that you failed to keep at every turn, and even dying on the cross. His defendant has His righteousness, and everyone knows it! The Judge rules and says, "Oh, you have Jesus? That changes everything. Well, in that case, you are not guilty! Case dismissed, you are free to go... TO HEAVEN!" The gavel sounds, and now you get to live and reign with Him for all eternity!!! How would anyone in that situation refrain from thanking and praising the one who got them acquitted?

Do you know how this section in Romans goes on? There's a good chance that you do... They are some of the purest, beautiful words that people like us can ever hear! **In fact, there is no difference, 23 because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus Romans 3:22b-24**

Have you ever thought of how a gavel must sound to those in the courtroom? It is a sound that suggests finality, that a sentence has been carried out. But it

must produce drastically different emotions depending on who you are. If you are the defendant and have been wronged, and the judge rules in your favor, then the gavel must be one of the sweetest sounds. But if, you are the accused, and the judge rules against you? That gavel sound must be one the loneliest, depressing sounds you could ever hear. It has the capacity to stun and overwhelm simultaneously.

The same is true about the sounds produced by the Law and Gospel. When we sinners look at the Law, it shows us our sin, and we are stunned to think of the sentence that is heading our way. But then we look at the Gospel, and it shows us our Savior! Even though we are guilty as charged, that is not the final verdict with Jesus! Jesus has saved us forever from that! We are saved because Jesus chose to suffer and die for us. We are justified because we believe by faith that Jesus has redeemed us for sin and death forever! We stand eternally acquitted!

New Year is a holiday that not only looks back but also looks forward. We can look back on the previous year and look ahead to the next one. This year provides a chance to also look back on the previous decade and speculate on the 2020s. What do we see when we look back and what can we see going forward? Through God's Word, we see two drastically different things. What do we see? Sin and Grace! One comes from us and the other comes to us. We have sinned in the previous year and decade, too much to even be counted. We are silenced by what we have done, and there is no one to pass the blame to. It all falls on us and we fall silent. The only good response we can have to this is, "LORD, have mercy!"

But then we see the grace that our God has truly given us. He gave us Jesus who threw our trespasses into the depths of the ocean. He removed them from us as far as the east is from the west! The blame gets passed to Him and He bore it all on the cross. The gavel sounds, and instead of producing terror, for we who have been given faith in Jesus, it now only produces joy forever!

In the course of the year, there are many different things that we do, and there are many different things

that are done for us or to us. Some we would rather forget and some we fondly remember. When we look back and ahead, we see the stains of sin. But that is not what God sees. Instead, He sees Jesus and you clothed in His righteousness. This fact is truly overwhelming, and through faith, it naturally produces praise to flow from our lips. What is the audible response to Christ's Gospel? It is words of praise, words such as the psalm we stated responsively to start our worship this morning. **Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness! 6 Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord! AMEN!**