

# DIAMONDS OF SALVATION

## ROMANS 3:19-26

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

When you purchase a diamond the jeweler will display the stones on a piece of black velvet. He knows a *dark* backdrop *brightens* the appearance of the diamonds. In Romans 3 Paul displays *the diamonds of salvation*. He puts on exhibit some magnificent stones - the glory and grace of God shine and twinkle for all to see. God invites the world into the gallery to gawk and gaze and show its gratitude for the brilliant salvation He offers us. But Paul is a shrewd jeweler. He presents these diamonds against the black velvet of man's sin. The first three chapters of Romans describe the total depravity of the human race. Read these three chapters in one sitting and you'll be depressed... The picture is ugly... The outlook is grim... In fact, by the time you reach the middle of Romans 3 mankind is down for the count! We're all lost, and condemned, and damned to hell.

Look at chapter 3... Verse 10 slams the lid on the coffin, "*There is none righteous, no, not one.*" Verse 11 drives the nails into the lid, "*There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God...*" Verse 12 lowers the coffin into the ground, "*There is none who does good, no, not one.*" Verse 23 shovels the dirt on top of the vault, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" There you have it - the death and burial of the entire human race. Paul guns us down with the machine gun of repetition. "*There is none... There is none... There is none... There is none...*" Paul uses the *none gun* to shoot down our pride and self-righteousness! The truth of our sin cuts our legs out from under us. It's impossible to think we can stand on our own.

By the middle of chapter 3 the velvet is as dark as it can get - but that's the intent... Remember, the *darker* the backdrop the *brighter* the diamonds! Picture Paul the jeweler... He *spreads out* an ebony cloth and *sprinkles out* four sparkling, brilliant stones. On your own the situation is hopeless. You could never afford these expensive gems on your own, but God devises a means of obtainment that doesn't depend on you. It's been *worked up* by His wisdom, and *worked out* by His grace. It was accomplished and paid for by Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross.

Tonight, let's marvel at these diamonds of salvation. Paul displays four beautiful gems - *justification, redemption, propitiation, and vindication*. And the mere sound of these words should produce goose bumps up. They should make us giddy. They should thrill us. They should be music to our ears... but what if we don't understand them at all? *These are big words...* What's a *justification, a redemption, a propitiation, a vindication?*

It reminds me of the pastor's little boy. Having been raised in church he had always *heard* terms like *justification* and *propitiation*... and so forth... But he had never really learned the meanings of the terms. One day at school, the teacher asked her class, "*What's the definition of the word procrastination?*" The pastor's son raised his hand. He said to the teacher... "*I'm not sure, but I know my church sure believes in it!*" Tonight I want to discuss four big words, that once you grasp they'll be a best friend. You've heard, "*Diamonds are a girl's best friend.*" And that's true of Jesus' girl, His bride, the Church. These diamonds will win our heart!

The first diamond of salvation is *Justification*. In verse 24, Paul says we're "*being justified freely by his grace*". Biblically speaking, to "*justify*" a person is to treat them as if they've always been just, righteous, sinless. It's to be viewed by God, *just-as-if-I'd* never sinned. This is how God treats you if you've put your faith in Jesus!

Once a rich, English gentlemen purchased a Rolls Royce, and had the car shipped to France where he planned a journey across Europe. Yet a few days into his trip, the car broke down. The man called the dealership back in England to see if they could provide him some assistance. Immediately, a crew of mechanics were flown across the English Channel. The men worked nonstop until the repairs were complete. When the man arrived home in England he expected a hefty bill for the extraordinary service the Rolls Royce mechanics had provided him, but a bill never came. After a few weeks, he called and inquired about the cost... He was surprised when the clerk at the dealership replied, *"What bill?"* He told her, *"Why, the bill for the repairs you made on my car in France."* She said, *"What repairs?"* *"Surely you remember the team of mechanics that flew to France to work on my car? Please, check your records..."* After a long pause the woman told him, *"Sir, I'm sorry but we have no record of any Rolls Royce ever breaking down and needing repairs."* Now that's the way every car dealership should operate!

Understand, justification doesn't mean God ignores our breakdowns. He fixes us, but He keeps no record of our malfunction. He considers it as having never happened. God services us - tunes us - fixes our flats - repairs the damage caused by our sin... *then never charges us a dime*. Now that's a pretty good warranty!

Justification includes forgiveness, but it's more than forgiveness... Forgiveness is me paying off your credit card debt... *but you can run it up again*. Justification goes further - it's me paying off your debt; then supplying a line of credit so you'll always maintain a positive balance. Jesus guarantees His followers that we'll never be caught with insufficient funds!

Notice too, verse 24 doesn't say we've *"been justified"* - we are *"being justified."* It's a continuous tense. God is constantly treating you as if you'd never sinned even when you do! How He handles you remains the same. Of course, it grieves God when we sin, and He works to mature us so it doesn't keep happening - but God never alters how He chooses to treat us. God never tells one of His kids, *"Ok sister, that's it! I've had enough of you! Hit the road, and don't come back until you straighten out your mess."* God has never said to a believer, *"Forget about my blessing until you measure up."* Justification is God's decision to favor me in spite of my sin!

We all need to settle this issue once and for all in our minds and hearts... As long as we trust in Jesus, He's committed to treating us as *justified*. *And do you realize what this means?* You never again should feel timid or fearful about approaching God. Even when you're not doing so well, He wants you to call on Him. He's as ready to bless you when you're *struggling* as when you're *soaring*. Justification means the terms of God's treatment never, ever change!

I read of a Bible College prof who was a godly man. When he walked into the classroom he oozed with God's grace, and glowed with God's glory. His students wanted to uncover the secret of his holy and heavenly life, so one night they hid in the bushes outside his window to listen to this spiritual man pray. They anticipated a fervent, passionate, pleading prayer. They were shocked when the old fellow jumped into bed, pulled up the covers, and sighed, *"God, I thank you that we're on the same old terms."* But that's what it means to be justified! No matter what happens or how well I perform - in Christ I'm always *on the same old terms* with God.

Now let's go back to the earlier picture. *Diamond dealing Paul* spreads out an ebony cloth on the countertop - he opens a pouch, and sprinkles out these sparkling, brilliant diamonds. The girl by your side squeals in delight. She's about to squeeze the blood out of your arm... when you start looking at the price tags! Beads of sweat pop up on your forehead... the wad of money in your pocket shrinks. Now imagine the salesman putting the diamonds back in their pouch, handing them to you, and then saying, *"Please, take them. They're yours! These diamonds are my gift to you. Just enjoy them - and be thankful for them - and tell other people about them."* *You'd faint on the spot...*

Yet that's exactly what God has done! Verse 24 says we've been *"justified freely."* The word translated *"freely"* means *"without a cause."* There's nothing *in us* or *about us* - nothing we've done - or are - or ever hope to be that can warrant this kind of treatment. Romans 3 tells us the price was paid *"by His blood."* This is what Jesus did on the cross. His sacrifice enabled God's love to treat me as justified. Now it comes to me as grace - *as unmerited favor*. *It's love that's on the house!* No human virtue can merit this kind of treatment from God. The only explanation for why God deals with me so kindly... *is that He loves me!*

Once, a little boy visited the Washington Monument. He walked up to the soldier on duty, pulled out a quarter, and asked if he could buy the Monument. The soldier chuckled, "Not for a quarter." But the little wheeler-dealer wasn't through. He said, "*I thought you'd say that*", and pulled out another dime. After the soldier finished laughing he explained... "Sonny, there's three things you need to know... **First**, you can't buy the Washington Monument - not for 35 cents or \$35 million. It's too expensive. **Second**, this monument is not for sale. And **third**, if you're an American citizen you don't need to buy this monument, for it already belongs to you."

Many believers long to feel forgiven and be confident in their relationship with God. They want to believe God is as good as I've described Him! But our confidence wanes in light of our own weakness. When burdened down by my own sin and guilt and failure, I tend to draw back from God. I assume I have to earn my way back into God's favor. I start to assume, "*After what I've done, I need to buy the monument.*" But justification is not for sale... It's way too expensive. It requires what we don't have – *sinless blood*... And if you're in Christ it already belongs to you. Wait until you get it together to return to God, and you'll wait forever; rather put all your trust in Jesus, and let God treat you with His grace.

The second diamond of salvation is **Redemption**. In verse 24 Paul adds that we've been justified, "*through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*". There are actually several different Greek words that get translated into English by this single word, "*redemption*."

One is "*agorazo*." It's from the word "*agora*" which referred to the city center. The agora was the marketplace - the place where slaves were auctioned and sold. The word "*agorazo*" refers to the "*purchase of a slave*" If you're a Christian you're now the purchased possession of Jesus. He holds the title deed to your life. Through the blood of His Son, God purchased you out of sin's slavery... You're no longer your own, now you belong to Jesus. *But the word "agorazo" is not the word used here...*

There's another Greek word translated "*redemption*" - "*exagorazo*." It too refers to the purchase of a slave, but "*exagorazo*" speaks of permanence. Many Roman landowners bought slaves to help in the fields - then sold them back after the harvest time. But a slave purchased "*exagorazo*" was never returned. He became His Master's permanent possession. This is also how Jesus sees you. His plan is not to use you up - then trade you in. He loves you and wants you forever. You're His permanently... "*exagorazo...*" *But neither is this the word used in our text...*

The word translated "*redemption*" in verse 24 is the word "*lytruo*." It refers to the practice of purchasing a slave for the purpose of setting him free! This is also what Jesus has done for you! He bought you out of spiritual slavery to set you free from the pain, and guilt, and sin... all that's been holding you back and keeping you down... He wants to deliver you. Jesus purchases you to restore you to all God meant for you to be.

Two factory workers labored side-by-side for years. One was the classic underachiever - always late and lazy - always on the verge of being fired. But one day his co-worker noticed a remarkable change. Overnight, the slothful man began to care about his job. He turned into a productive employee and a pleasure to work with. His entire attitude was transformed. His co-worker asked him why! He heard an amazing story... While in college this fellow had been involved in a fraternity hazing. One night they'd taken a few freshmen to a long, dark, graveled road for a so-called "*test of nerve*." They put the freshmen in the middle of the road and drove straight at them. The kids were supposed to wait as long as possible before leaping to safety. Tragically, one of the young men froze... The factory worker was driving the car that hit the boy going 70 mph. This man's foolish action haunted him the rest of his life. He avoided prosecution, but dropped out of school. He became an alcoholic. That one incident sucked the life out of him. He lost all motivation. He could never forget the terrified look on the boy's face just before his car ran over him.

Until one day... He received a visitor. It was the mother of the young man he'd killed. She said she had hated him for years and had plotted her revenge. But recently she'd given her life to Jesus and now she wanted to forgive the man who had killed her son. The man said to his friend about the mother's visit, "*I looked deep into her eyes that morning and received permission to be the kind of man I might've been had I never killed that boy. Her forgiveness changed my life.*" A pardon bought him his freedom! This is the meaning of **redemption!**

If you'll look closely at the cross of Jesus tonight, you too will find permission to start over. Jesus wants to help you be the person you might've been!

This is why He purchased you... He wants to set you free! Whatever it is you've done... that's haunted you for years... listen to the words of God, *"You're forgiven!"* You have God's permission to start over!

I told you the diamonds of salvation were beautiful, dazzling stones - and the third diamond is equally spectacular – it's the jewel of **Propitiation**. Verse 25 refers to Jesus... *"Whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God has passed over the sins that were previously committed"* Notice, in times past, when judgment was due, God restrained His hand. There were countless occasions when God would've been just and fair in exterminating the whole human race, but He passed on the opportunity! Acts 17:30 tells us, in times past *"God winked"* at sin. He closed His eyes to the evil! And it wasn't that sin didn't bother Him... It bothered Him greatly.

I don't know about you, but I'm at the point where it's hard for me to even watch the nightly news. It riles me! Here's a sample from a single day... A 12 year old boy was used as a heroin mule. He was made to swallow 87 condoms filled with heroin so drug dealers could make a few bucks. A suicide bomber killed 6 people and injured 86 others. A teenager sexually assaulted and killed his 22 month old niece. And the list goes on and on... It's tough to stomach this stuff on a regular basis. It makes you mad. *But if it angers me, how do you think God feels?* I'm only exposed to this evil for a mere 22 minutes on the nightly news... While God sees every *grimy act* done in every *slimy place on the planet*. Trust me, He gets extremely angry! It arouses His wrath!

I read of the awful ordeal of a man in Tyler, Texas named *"Robert Hardy."* Hardy woke up one night, and went to check on his three month old son. When he walked into the boy's room he found the bassinet tipped over. He quickly returned to his bedroom to see if his wife had the baby. She didn't... They both ran downstairs in search of their child. When Hardy went into his study he noticed the glass top on the tank where he kept his pet python, had been pushed off... *Here's what happened...* The 12 foot snake had escaped his tank, slithered upstairs, tipped over the bassinet, and eaten the baby. Hardy was so enraged – so furious - he ran outside, found an ax, and chopped the snake into a thousand pieces. *And who would blame him?* The snake got what it deserved.

And in the same way God is infuriated when He looks down on the snake-like actions of humankind. Predators slithering along consuming innocent people! God is outraged at the rapists, child molesters, terrorists. And then He sees the Lady Gagas of the world sing about their love for Judas - and mock the very Son - God sacrificed to save us from our sin. God's holy sensibilities are continually being trampled on and violated... And not only by the snake-like actions of others - but I have to confess there've been times *when I've slithered with the best of them*. We've all been guilty of satisfying ourselves at the expense of someone else.

I'm sure God was tempted many times over to pick up an ax and chop up the snakes... *but He waited*. He waited for a day 2000 years ago... the day He nailed His Son to a Roman cross. There, God vented His anger toward the sin of the world. God brought down His ax on His only Son, Jesus. The reason God winked at sin in the past and suppressed His *righteous rage* is that He planned all along to take out His wrath on His own Son! Sandy Adams deserves to be hacked up, yet God unleashed his anger towards me on His only begotten Son... This is love that *moistens my eyes*, and *boggles my brain*. How could God love us that much... yet He does!

Which brings us to the definition of this long word, **"propitiation"** means *"to appease or placate."* The justice of God is *satisfied legally through justification* - but it is *satisfied emotionally through propitiation*. There were two very similar sacrifices in the OT... The sin offering covered a person's sin - while the burnt offering presented a sweet aroma to God. The sin offering *justified man* - while the burnt offering *satisfied God*... And today, the cross of Jesus does both. It justifies us *and* it satisfies God's justice. God both vented His anger and outrage toward sin - and found justice at the cross of Jesus.

When we trace this Greek word **"propitiation"** to its Hebrew origin we discover it's the same word translated in the OT as *"mercy seat."* Remember in Jerusalem's Temple, God's glory rested over an oblong-shaped box called the Ark of the Covenant... *It was the box Indiana Jones stole from the Nazis*... In this Ark were the stone tablets God gave to Moses. God intended to meet with man over the Ark. The basis for man's relationship with God was his obedience to the Law written on those tablets. But this doesn't bode well for sinners like us. We fail and fall short. Since we're unable to *meet the sacred standard* - how could we *meet with God*? The Law literally cries out for our judgment, yet God put a *lid* on the *Law*!



Over the top of the Ark sat a solid gold lid called the "*mercy seat*." This was the place where the priest sprinkled the sacrificial blood that was shed for sin. Here the demands of the Law were satisfied, and God extended mercy. If you had lived in OT times, and wanted to meet with God, and receive His mercy - the directions were clear... head to the *mercy seat*. And Paul tells us that Jesus is now our "*propitiation*" or *place of mercy*! He alone has kept all God's commands. He's earned a right standing with God that He can pass on to us. "*So, where can I find God today? Where can I meet My Maker and discover His kindness and favor?*" The directions are still crystal clear... the cross of Jesus is now God's place of mercy.

There's one final diamond on display in this morning's text... In Romans 3:23, Paul explains how *your salvation* has become God's *Vindication*. *Justification, redemption, propitiation* - the first three diamonds produce in us a comfort, and a hope, and an assurance. They create for me a *sigh of relief*... but this last diamond of salvation... it *takes my breath away*! If the first three diamonds reflect God's *grace* - this fourth one reveals His *glory*! Paul tells us that on the cross, Jesus vindicated the character of God. In a single stroke of genius God became *both just AND the justifier*!

Understand, we look at the cross of Christ from a very narrow, selfish point-of-view. We tend to focus only on what Jesus did for us - *justification, redemption, propitiation* - but there's another beautiful side to the cross... Songwriter, Steve Camp, has a song entitled, "*Christ died for God*." What a provocative title! Jesus not only died for you, but He also died for God. His motivation wasn't merely *our salvation*, but *God's vindication*.

Our sin puts God in an awkward situation. He's pulled in two directions. On the one hand, His justice demands that we be punished. We should get what's coming to us... On the other hand, His love compels Him to forgive and fix us. God wants to help us, but His justice can't let sin slide.

Think about America's judicial system and today's crisis of confidence. We've let too many blatant criminals walk - get off with a slap-on-the-wrist... No wonder we question if our courts are still capable of meting out justice. God won't allow this kind of erosion of confidence to occur in His court. That's why as much as He loves us, He can't allow us to get off scot-free. And that's why *Christ died for God*. On the cross Jesus made a way for God to *save us* and *save face* at the same time. Through the work of Jesus on Calvary's cross *sin was punished, AND the sinner was forgiven*. Jesus *satisfied justice AND set us free*.

The story is told of a time when nomadic tribes roamed the plains of Siberia, much the way American Indians covered the Great Plains. There was a Russian tribe with a strong, wise ruler. This chief was well respected. One day it was discovered that the camp had fallen victim to a series of thefts. The chief ordered the perpetrator caught and beaten with 10 lashes. But the thefts continued. The chief upped the ante to 20, even 40 lashes. Of course, everyone knew 40 lashes was a death sentence. The only tribe-member tough enough to survive such a beating was the chief himself.

What a shock, when the thief turned out to be the chief's own mother. The chief was tempted to let his mom go, but he couldn't. The chief was a man of his word... justice had to be served... The woman was tied to a stump - the executioner readied his whip - and just as the man was about to administer the first blow, the chief walked over to the stump, and draped his huge body over his small, frail mother... and took her 40 lashes for her. Only God is strong enough *to execute justice and be executed for love*. Only God can take the full brunt of our sin - and win our forgiveness. God became a man and draped His body over all those who trust Him. He's now a *righteous judge* and a *loving Son* - and I'm proud of Him for being both!

As they say, "*Diamonds are a girl's best friend*" - and they may be, but these diamonds of salvation are every Christian's best friend... *justification, redemption, propitiation, vindication* - have you received God's free gift? And if you've received these diamonds, are you proud of them? Do you wear them close to your heart and everywhere you go? Do you think about them - talk about them - count them as your greatest treasure? Today, *you have a friend in the diamond business*... Jesus Christ!