

Four of us standing at the row of taps in the centre of the school playground. Sent by the classroom teacher to wash a bucketful of paint brushes. Our Year One art lesson just finished. One of the boys particularly noisy. Infants mistress strides out of her classroom. Feather duster in hand. Wack, wack, wack, wack. Across our back legs just above the knee. Without a word she returns to her classroom. Just punishment from a righteous judge. No way. Trouser wearing Henry making all the noise, laughed it off. The rest of us subdued, stung by the injustice and the mark on the back of our legs. Miscarriage of justice at Cowra Primary School. Arbitrary punishment from an unjust judge. Assessment of the actions of the infants mistress matters little in the big scheme of things. Assessment of the actions of the living God does matter. What is your assessment? Under what circumstances would you describe God as unjust in his judgement? Is the promised future day of universal judgement a divine kangaroo court? Considering these questions central to this last part of the dark valley section of Romans. The righteousness of God foundational in the Biblical narrative. Affirmed by Jew and Christian alike. Taught in Romans as a given. The righteousness of God revealed in the gospel that brings salvation to those who believe: Jew first, then the Gentile. The righteousness of God revealed in the outpouring of God's wrath now and in the judgement to come. Righteous judgement on the Jew first, then the Gentile. No argument from the Jew in this. Confident of their acquittal on judgement day. As the chosen people of God. In possession of the law of God. Marked by the covenant sign of circumcision. Superior to the Gentiles in knowledge of God and standards of behaviour. However, Paul smashes Jewish misplaced confidence while affirming the righteousness of God. Highlighting Jews condemning others while doing the same thing. Stubborn, unrepentant hearts exposing Jews on the day of impartial judgement by the righteous judge. Paul's twofold purpose in this final section. Defend the righteousness of God in judging insider and outsider **v1-8**. Reaffirm the truth of universal unrighteousness **v9-20**. Paul's hypothetical of **ch2** continues. Nine rapid fire questions and answers. Dialogue with imaginary but representative Jews. The complexity of these verses demands more thorough examination than possible in today's message. Let me draw to your attention three things. **One**, the advantage of being a Jew. Question arising from potential Jewish response to Paul's teaching. The advantage: being entrusted with the words of God. **V1-2**, *'What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in*

*circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, the Jews have been entrusted with the very words of God.*

For the purpose of preserving, protecting, obeying God's words as chosen people of God. An advantage not extended to the Gentile before Christ. Reliant on the Jew to reveal the knowledge of God's will. Christians have the same privilege. Brothers and sisters, how are you exercising the sacred trust God has placed in you? What steps are you taking to protect the integrity of God's word, to pass it on to others? **Two**, God's faithfulness uncompromised. The unfaithfulness of God's children in no way sets aside or diminishes God's faithfulness to his character and his promises. By very definition Yahweh, the LORD perfectly righteous in all he does. Affirmed in **Psalm 51:4**, from which Paul quotes. Written by King David after his adultery and murder. David acknowledges his sin against God, declaring God's condemnation of him as wholly justified. The human tendency: respond to unrighteousness with unrighteousness. God does not act that way. Incapable of unrighteousness. In fact, righteousness on display in God's just, impartial judgement of all humanity. **Three**, the folly of suggesting God unjust in punishing sin. Because human unrighteousness amplifies God's righteousness. *'But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? v5* As ludicrous as saying, I'm going to encourage and condone atrocious behaviour in other children because it shows how good my kids are. The suggestion foolish because it denies a truth about God that undeniable. As the creator he has the right to hold his creation to account. As the righteous God he must judge the world justly. He cannot let evil go unpunished. Or perpetrate an evil by partial, biased judgement. Brothers and sisters, no amount of clever pleading or fancy sidesteps overturn the truth. God the righteous Judge. Which leads Paul to his second purpose in this passage. Reaffirming the truth of universal unrighteousness. **v9-20** A word for Jew and Gentile alike. *What shall we conclude then? Do we have any advantage? Not at all! For we have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under the power of sin.' v9* Just in case his fellow Jew or eavesdropping Gentile not convinced. Paul quotes the Bible. Ecclesiastes, various Psalms. Summed up in **v10-12**, *"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."* Comprehensive, conclusive. The Bible tells me so. No one, not even one, excluded from this description of sinful humanity. Jew and Gentile. Any lingering belief the law will save

the Jew on judgement day misunderstands the purpose of the law. *'Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.'* **v19-20** The law does not save. The law convicts of sin, silences human presumption, convincing people of culpability before God, revealing the standard by which the Jew judged and the whole world held accountable. No further challenges available before the righteous Judge. The intention of God's law: to show the Jew their need for grace is no different from Gentile sinners. Sisters and brothers, where do you find yourself at the end of the dark valley? Try this diagnostic test. Mentally, tick the yes or no box. Are you confident in the perfect righteousness of God? Convicted that you deserve God's righteous judgement. Are you trying to avoid accountability before God? By ignoring God and the challenge of the gospel; employing moral and intellectual arguments to dismiss Christian faith; relying on your beliefs, achievements; trusting in religious activity; denying there is a future judgement because God is love. Do you recognise there is a lifeline offered by the grace and mercy of God? Brothers and sisters, the light in the dark valley, the grace and mercy of God, about to be unveiled. Revealing the righteousness of God. Bringing us full circle back to **Romans 1:17**. *'For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."* What God has done for us in Christ majestically laid before us in **v21-26**. Lifegiving truths not to be missed.