

JUSTICE VINDICATED AND RIGHTEOUSNESS EXEMPLIFIED

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A SERMON
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“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”
Romans 3:24-26

THE death of our Lord Jesus Christ answered many valuable purposes. It manifested the manifold wisdom of God. To angels in heaven and to saints on earth, God never appeared so infinitely wise as in the ordaining of the plan of salvation by the substitution of His Son for guilty sinners. That death also revealed God’s amazing love. It proclaimed to astonished worlds how “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

The atonement of Christ answered the purpose, moreover, of purifying His people. That He might sanctify the people by His own blood, He suffered outside the camp. He loved His church and gave Himself for it, we know, “that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.”

The cross has also been the great battering-ram for breaking down the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile. It is by Christ’s blood that we are made one. “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” Caste is abolished and invidious distinctions are set aside. There is no longer in Christ Jesus barbarian, Scythian, bond or free, circumcised or uncircumcised, but Christ is All-in-all.

That same atoning sacrifice also broke down the wall which separated both Jew and Gentile from God—“that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.” The alienation prevailed till the reconciliation was effected by the precious blood of Jesus. We remain enemies in our minds by wicked works until we see the great love wherewith He loved us, and then that love melts our heart and makes us friends of God.

Time would fail me did I attempt to enter into anything like an enumeration of the blessed purposes which the blood of Christ serves before God and among men. Try, if you can, to calculate the inestimable value of the air you breathe, how every plant feeds upon it, or upon some portion of it—how every creature, whether on the loftiest mountains, or in the deepest mines, must have a portion of it or else he can no longer exist. Think of the force with which it operates upon the world in wind and tempest. Need I do more than suggest to you the infinite number of ways in which the air becomes valuable, not merely as an accessory to our comfort, but as a necessity of our life?

Yet, how infinitely more precious is the blood of Jesus Christ, which in every way and in every place becomes efficacious to the everlasting salvation of all believers! That water which sustains the life of leviathan, and of an infinite multitude of fishes, is your drink and mine. It makes glad the meads, it fertilizes every field, and gives to the husbandman his harvest.

But while it does this, it has other uses which we cannot stop here to dilate upon. See how it bears today upon its bosom the commerce of the world and becomes the highway of nations. When you shall have recalled all the excellencies of the water, with which God has girdled the globe, you shall then have but opened a parable thoroughly inadequate to represent the immeasurable benefits which come to us through Christ—and the innumerable forms which those benefits assume. We know that it has an operation in the highest heaven—certainly it has saved us from the deepest hell.

Do you see that cross on which Jesus died? What is it more than a simple piece of transverse wood? I see it in vision. I see it growing till its top reaches the most excellent glory, lifting up the elect to the very throne of the Most High. I see its base sinking deep as our helpless miseries could plunge us in hopeless ruin, going down till it reaches even the depths of the vengeance of God. I see its arms spread till all whom God has chosen are sheltered beneath them and all mankind receive some favors which never would have come to them if it had not been that there the Savior of sinners offered the one availing sacrifice for sin.

As when the servant of Elijah saw a little cloud, the size of a man's hand, and the prophet marked in that the sign of abundance of rain—so, when I see the cross of Calvary, it is as a little cloud, but faith beholds it spread all over heaven, and then drop down in mighty showers of mercy to fructify the earth and bless the children of men. If you would count the drops that fall from that cloud, you must grasp “infinity” in your comprehension.

According to our text it appears that one main purpose of the sacrifice of Christ was the manifestation of the righteousness of God. The apostle twice over assures us that this was the case, “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation...to declare his righteousness.” And as if this were not enough, “to declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness.” What a grand thought! *The death of Jesus Christ is a resplendent manifestation of divine righteousness.*

When we have mused upon that, we will proceed to notice that divine righteousness—the moral government of the Almighty—is, by the death of Christ, cleared of two difficulties to which reference is made. Then we shall close by noting the lessons which this great doctrine teaches.

I have nothing new to say this evening—I should be ashamed of myself if I had [See “The Old Gospel and the New Theology.” Twelve sermons by C. H. Spurgeon]. This is the old doctrine, this is the soul-saving truth. It is blessedly simple, and we thank God that it is, and that therefore the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein. It is plain to him that understands, and if the Lord gives us understanding in this thing, we certainly have here the beginning—and we shall soon have in it the end of wisdom.

I. JESUS' DEATH, THEN, MANIFESTED DIVINE JUSTICE IN THE VERY HIGHEST DEGREE.

The expulsion of our first parents from the garden of Eden did manifest the justice of God, but not fully. They were only expelled from paradise, but their lives were spared. In strict justice, they should have died. “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Though that curse was not confined to natural death, it certainly included it. Had justice there been fully vindicated, the human race would have been utterly destroyed. The expulsion of the sinner does not so fully set forth God's righteousness as does the expiation of the Savior.

The justice of God was exhibited in dreadful forms when the deluge came and swept the race of man from the earth. Yet why was yonder ark freighted with the chosen eight? Were they not sinners? If justice is come out in its full strength, why does it permit so many as eight to escape? The number may be few, but the principle is infringed. In strict, severe justice, apart from the atonement, not even Noah could have escaped, and certainly not his unrighteous son Ham. The eight, as they are floating yonder, indicate the exercise of some other prerogative than that of absolute and naked justice.

Then comes the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. See them, with the other cities of the plain, licked up by tongues of fire. Behold the light smoke as it ascends and clouds the heavens! But here was only divine justice upon one atrocious sin—a sin which will forever bear the name of the place in which

it came to its worst height. It was not the declaration of God's justice against sin as sin, so much as against sin in a certain form when the virus of evil had been most banefully developed.

Hark to the shriek that goes up from the midst of the Red Sea, when the waters, that stood upright as a heap, suddenly descend and lock in their death-woosing arms the multitudes of Egyptian chivalry! Do you not see here the justice of God? You do, but you do not see it so completely, because a multitude of sinners, in front, have escaped by this very destruction.

I grant you that, here, a most blessed type of our Lord Jesus Christ is conspicuous, but there is not a complete declaration of divine justice, for had divine justice slaughtered all sinners on that occasion, Israel would have been drowned as well as Egypt. There rather the pride of Pharaoh was subdued than the sin of Egypt. That judgment fell only upon the chief of Egypt, the chief of all her strength was smitten there—but judgment must come upon the little as well as upon the great, when it comes from the hand of the Most High in its absolute force.

Of all the other judgments which we find mentioned in Holy Scripture, it is enough to say that they were manifestations of divine justice, but they were not such manifestations of it as we have in Christ. If I might use such a metaphor, divine vengeance slept and all those judgments were but its startings in its sleep. God had not yet laid bare His terrible right arm—judgment was then His strange work. He did not put both His hands to the tremendous work of punishment as He did afterwards, when His only-begotten Son stood before Him—the Just in the place of the unjust, and the Guiltless with the guilt of man upon His shoulders.

The death of Christ did more clearly set forth the righteousness of God than all these put together. In some respects, even hell itself cannot so exhaust the vindication of infinite justice. Do you demur to this last assertion? You may well do so, till I explain my meaning. It needs a whole eternity to set forth, in hell, all the justice of God in the punishment of sin. To manifest to those who suffer, being impenitent, all the vengeance of incensed Deity, demands an ageless age of years, countless and interminable.

Behold the Lamb of God! In Christ you have set forth at once all the fullness of the vengeance of God against the sins of men. See the cup of trembling drained to its utmost dregs. See the baptism accomplished. He sank beneath the swelling waves of vindictive wrath, but lo! He rises again. He has finished the endurance and paid the debt that none could reckon. There is more of the vindication of justice on the tree than can be seen at any one time, or at any one point, in the lowest depths of hell.

The death of Christ gloriously set forth divine justice *because it taught manifestly this truth, that sin can never go without punishment*. It is a law of God's moral universe that sin must be punished. He has made that as necessary as the law of gravitation. The law of gravitation He may suspend—the law of justice, never. He will by no means spare the guilty. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

As the Lord had appointed the salvation of His people, even this, the dearest desire of His soul, does not lead Him to tamper with His inviolable law. No, a Substitute shall be provided, who shall to the utmost farthing pay whatever His people owe. Upon His head the fire-cloud shall discharge itself, and into His bosom shall be emptied out the coals of fire. No pardon without punishment!

If the question is asked, "Why not?" It is enough to say that, so long as God rules the universe, He rules it in wisdom, and His wisdom knows that it would be unsafe if sin were at any time permitted to be blotted out apart from satisfaction received. Christ, therefore, must Himself give a satisfaction for sin, that this rule may be declared and written upon the forefront of the skies—God will not pardon sin by overlooking it—there must be redemption before there can be remission.

This was shown also very clearly in what the Savior had to endure. A part of the penalty of sin is *shame*. The wicked will rise "to shame and everlasting contempt." Rebellion against God is the most contemptible thing that angels ever heard of. The devil will be recognized, at last, as the worst of fools and become the object of intense mockery.

But see our Savior! When He takes the sinner's place, "He is despised and rejected of men." His own disciples, as it were, hid their faces from Him. "He was despised and we esteemed him not." He is

the song of the drunkard. Reproach has broken His heart. They that sit in the gate speak against Him. They spit in His face, they bow the knee, and hail Him with mock homage. They put Him to the death of a slave—they give Him the pre-eminent place of shame as center of the three crucified ones.

Never was shame more shameful than in the experience of our Lord. Here God seemed to declare, once for all, how shameful in His sight sin was. When sin lay but by imputation upon His own dear Son, His Son must be an object of scorn to the universe.

Transcendent was His *sorrow* as well as His shame. We cannot divine His meaning when He said, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.” Your sympathies can never interpret those pangs of heart which forced the blood to stream from every pore.

His physical sufferings alone are enough to make us faint, if we would but think of them aright. As for His soul’s sufferings, which were the soul of His sufferings, here is enough to melt our hearts away in grief that we should ever have caused Him thus to die. When the Lord thus emptied out all His quivers, and shot every arrow against the heart of His dear Son—when all His waves and His billows went over Him—when deep called unto deep, and there was the noise of God’s waterspouts, and Christ was made to sink in deep mire where there was no standing—then God declared most loudly what an intolerable evil sin is, how supremely just He is, and how jealous of His justice.

In the Savior’s sufferings, shame and sorrow were deepened, both of them, *by divine desertion*. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” has the grief of ages in it. Here you have tremendous pangs distilled and given to Christ in quintessence. “*Eloi, Eloi, lama Sabachthani?*” is a more desperate cry than ever came from lost souls. Every word of it was emphatic, every syllable needs to be pronounced with the awful force of one who is in the pangs of death and in the pangs of hell, for the Savior could truly say, “The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me; I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, deliver my soul.”

No answer came, for God had forsaken Him. His enemies persecuted and took Him, and there was none to deliver Him. Herein, in the leaving of His own Son, His only-begotten Son, His ever-obedient Son, God showed His intense righteousness and hatred of sin.

Nor was Christ spared the last pinch—one would have thought that He might have been spared that—*He died*. Here shame, and sorrow, and desertion reached the culminating point—the Savior dies. The holy soul is parted from the pure and blessed body. He suffers the very pangs of death. He yields up the ghost. Though immortal, He dies. Brightness of the Father’s glory, He slumbers in the tomb!

See Him, believer, as the disciples take Him down, drawing out the nails, one by one, so tenderly! See Him as they lay Him in the sheet which the holy women had prepared and wrap Him up in the spices which Nicodemus in his love, and Joseph of Arimathaea in his bounty, had brought! See the Savior, as they put Him in the tomb and go away sorrowing, for the stone is laid and the seal is set upon Him!

See Him, I say. See Him, whom angels worship, “over all God, blessed forever,” sleeping thus a captive in the grave! Does not JEHOVAH here reveal how He hates sin in that He spared not His own Son? The Christ must die when sin and expiation come into contact, even though that contact be but by imputation.

To one more point I must call your attention. *The excellency of the Person who suffered all this is the great platform upon which God displays His righteousness*. He who suffered this was the Just One—of spotless nature—a King. “The King of the Jews.” He was the Messiah, the Shiloh, whom God had foreordained to be the Mediator of the covenant. Nay, more, He was the Son of the Highest, being begotten of the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary. Mounting higher still, He was Himself “very God of very God.” It is a great mystery, one which, however, we receive with reverence.

The hand that was stretched out to the nail is the very hand that wields the scepter of universal empire. The heart that was pierced is the very heart which will beat on throughout eternity in love to His people. Yet more, the very Being, who thus became capable of suffering, was He who built the heavens and scattered the stars like dust along the sky. Who bespoke the light and said, “Light be,” and sent forth

the Spirit to brood over chaos and brought order out of its confusion. “Without him was not anything made that was made.”

He is the express image of His Father’s glory and Person—“in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.” I merely talk—this theme demands an angel’s tongue to sing. Sing of Him, spirits before the throne, in your rapturous song—sing of Him, in wonder that He should ever leave your happy choirs, and forsake the throne of His eternal glory, to become a man! Sing of Him when He stripped Himself of His azure mantle and did hang it on the sky—and took away His golden rings and hung them up like stars—and laid aside the vestments of His glorious reign and came to dwell in humble garments of clay!

Oh, mysterious love! He came to suffer, bleed, and die. Oh, mystery of righteousness, that such a One as this should have to bleed, should have to smart, even to the uttermost, and be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross! Never, then, did righteousness receive such vindication as when God, the mighty Maker, having assumed flesh, in that flesh died for man, the creature’s, sin.

II. THIS GREAT MANIFESTATION OF DIVINE RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE PERSON OF CHRIST, as I understand the text, INTELLIGIBLY CLEARS GOD’S MORAL GOVERNMENT OF TWO GREAT DIFFICULTIES.

When Christ became a propitiation, He declared God’s righteousness for the remission of sin. We are pardoned through the forbearance of God. For thousands of years, men lived and sinned, and yet were justified—rebelled, and yet were forgiven—wandered, yet were restored. I say, for thousands of years, poor fallible men claimed complete righteousness and entered into the rewards which belong exclusively to those who are justified before God.

There they go, streaming up to heaven, a long bright line of patriarchs, and prophets, and warriors for the holy cause, and kings, and priests, and saintly men and women who believed in God—and this was imputed to them for righteousness.

Now here we are in a difficulty. A just God is saving all these sinners and taking them to heaven without any sort of vindication of His justice! But Christ comes in and declares the righteousness of God, “for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God,” and all the difficulties of the antediluvian, and patriarchal, and Mosaic times are cleared up at once.

Another difficulty, with which you and I are far more concerned, is *how God can be just, and yet the Justifier*. The apostle says that this was cleared up, “To declare, I say, at this time, his righteousness; that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believes in Jesus.” This is the great problem which the world has been trying to solve. I know of no religion, except Unitarianism—which is not a religion, but a philosophy—which ever pretends to do without a sacrifice. It is remarkable that no religion can be popular except that which deals with a sacrifice for sin.

And where this is left out in any man’s ministry, you very soon find there are more spiders than hearers, and very soon the place, which might have been crowded under an evangelical ministry, grows empty. It is a happy circumstance that it is so, but it is a very significant one.

If a man were to open a shop for the sale of bread and were to sell nothing but stones, it is certain that he would have but few customers. The baker’s shop is the last that is shut up in the parish. When all other trades die out, his will live, for men must have bread.

And so, if every other good thing should pass away, the Gospel, because it meets the wants of common humanity, is quite certain to survive them all. Dr. Patten, the other Sabbath morning, said to me after service, “I am often asked why so many people come to the Tabernacle, and my dear friend,” he said, “I cannot give any answer. Can you?—except this one, that you do try to preach that which the soul wants, the essential and vital point of how men are saved and justified before God through Jesus Christ. And so,” he said, “if you keep to that old theme, there is no fear but what there will be enough hungry souls to come and feed upon that bread.” And so I think it is.

This I know, if a man would have a subject that will never grow stale and never wear out, let him preach Christ crucified. You need not go to philosophies, nor turn over the books in your libraries, to

find out some novelty—the old story is more novel than the new. There is nothing so new as Christ. We may say of Him, “Thou hast the dew of thy youth,” for Christ Jesus and His sacrifice exactly meet the common wants of our humanity.

Well, there is a sacrifice provided and that sacrifice, dear friends, I say, answers the question which God has put into every man’s mind—“How can I be saved, and yet God be just?” Man has the conviction, though he may not express it, that God is just. Every sinner knows that sin must be punished. He may trifle with that knowledge, but he cannot destroy it, and he never can get any peace of mind, when his conscience is really awakened, till he learns this great truth—God punished Christ instead of you.

Christ has so honored the law of God that, without God being unjust, or being thought to be so, He can forgive you. There has been such a satisfaction offered to God’s violated purity, that He can be discovered to be infinitely pure—nay, severely just and yet, at the same time, infinitely gracious and merciful.

O soul, have you ever caught a glimpse of this matter? My heart remembers when I first understood that. Though those words, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth,” were the channel of my comfort, yet the ground of it was this—I did see that Christ suffered for me, that Christ stood as a Substitute for believers, and that precious doctrine of substitution was the window of light to my dark soul.

Hear, you sinners, hear this! God demands of you two things—first, that you should keep His law. You cannot do this, for you have already broken it. If you never sinned again, you have put yourselves out of court. On Sinai’s mountain there is no safety for you. Even Moses said, “I do exceedingly fear and quake,” when Sinai was altogether on a smoke.

But God demands more than this. He demands punishment for the sins that are past, as well as a perfect obedience for the years to come. Can you bear this? Can you endure the flames of hell and the terrors of His vengeance? Your heart quails at the thought. Well, as Christ has come into the world, He has provided for both.

He knows your need. Christ has kept the law of God for you and Christ has suffered the penalty of that law, too. You have two answers to the Most High—and when conscience says, “You must be punished, for you are guilty,” you can say, “No, not I. Christ was punished for my sins. God will never punish two for one offense—first the Substitute, and then the sinner for whom He was a Substitute.”

And when conscience says, “Ah! but you cannot bring in a perfect righteousness,” you can answer, “Yes, I can, for Christ has wrought out and brought in a perfect righteousness, and He gives this to me, according to His own name and title, ‘JEHOVAH-TSIDKENU,’ the Lord our righteousness.”

Oh, that we might have grace, dear friends, to understand that all that God wants of us is found in Christ! You think there is something for you to do in order to save yourself, but Christ *has* saved all who will be saved—saved them already, virtually. And you shall be saved actually when, by humble faith, you receive the salvation which Christ has worked out.

To add to Christ anything of your own would be to tack on your own filthy rags to His gold and silver-threaded garments, to bring your filthy lucre to eke out the golden payment which He has laid down at God’s throne. Do not do this, sinner. God is content with Christ—be you content with Him, and as you see how God is just, see also how you may be happy and at peace.

III. And now I conclude by drawing TWO PRACTICAL LESSONS.

First, *let us see what an evil thing sin is and how God hates it.* Christian, do you hate it too? Loathe it. Never endure it. If I had to pass the place where some dear friend of mine was murdered, I should dread the very spot. But if there lived on earth the man who had stabbed my dearest friend to the heart, I think I could never bear him affection, but I should feel moved to stir the officers of justice to pursue him.

Now, your sins have murdered your Savior. Revenge here is holy. In other places, it must be very doubtful, but here it is sacred. Seize your sins. Where are they? Seize yourselves and you have them. If

you feel any anger against the murderer of Christ, turn to your looking-glass and see his face. There stands the man who slew his Friend. There stands he who killed his Friend, who died to save him. Yes, in the very act and suffering of murder that Friend gave Himself up to bleed and die for the good of His murderers.

Shall I spare the sins, then, that nailed my Savior to the tree? O Christian, how you ought to hate the very thought of sin! We are very severe upon the sins of others, sometimes —how much more severe ought we to be upon our own! Truly, a man's foes are they of his own household. The very thought of sin, the word of sin, the very garments spotted with the flesh, should be hated by the Christian. The Lord give us to feel more and more of this! We shall only get it, however, by living more where the groans of Calvary can meet our ears and the sight of the Savior's wounds can melt our hearts.

Then, *let us see our sad condition if we are not delivered from sin*. If Christ became the object of His Father's wrath when sin was only imputed to Him, how angry must God be, every day, with the wicked whose own sins lie upon themselves! There can be no more dreadful thought to a sinner than this—if we will look at it in that light—that God spared not His own Son. Surely, if the Judge smites His own Son so severely, He will not spare you, His enemy.

Ah, you who have no Savior and who have never looked to Christ to take away your sins, what will you do when you have to stand before the bar of God? Christ needed to be omnipotent to endure the stroke of His Father's sword, but what will you do when God's dreadful voice cries, "Awake, O sword, against My foe; against the man that despised My Son and trampled on His blood"?

The wrath of the Lamb is the worst thing a sinner can ever feel. "The wrath of the Lamb!" Think of that! When love turns to anger, it is cruel as the grave. To despise incarnate love is to entail upon yourself infinite misery. They who perish without the knowledge of Christ, perish happily compared with you. It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for you if you have despised Christ.

My hearers, I have tried as best I can to preach Christ to you, and to lift Him up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. But some of you will not look at Him. I fear you never will look, but that you will die in your sins.

It was but the other day that I heard of one of your number who, after listening to this voice, suddenly went into eternity in a moment. And the like is happening to very many. You will not be able to say, at the last, that you never heard of Christ, or that I covered Him up amidst a multitude of gaudy periods and high-sounding words.

I have set forth Christ Jesus in all the naked beauty of His mysterious sacrifice. Look to Him, souls! If I have never been able to move your heart before, may God move it now! Look to Jesus! Is salvation such a thing to be trifled with, that you can live without it? Are the joys of being reconciled to God such trifles that you will not have them? If you had to die like dogs, it would be worthwhile to prove the happiness of being reconciled to God in this life.

But oh, remember the world to come! You shall soon pass through the gates of the grave—the death-sweat will settle on your brows—the night of death shall seal your eyes. What will you do, in those few solemn moments when the last sands are trickling from the hourglass, without a Savior?

Say not that these are things not to be talked of because they are too distant. Men and women, they will come to you. Tomorrow, ere next Sabbath bells shall toll, you may be hurried to the land where the sound of the church-going bell is never heard. May God lead you to lay hold of Christ now, for if not, there remains for you nothing but the fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation.

The trumpet sounds, the dead awake, Jesus sits upon the great white throne, the heavens are opened, the angels come to gather God's harvest, and it is gathered into the garner. But now they come to reap the vintage—and with their sickles they cut down cluster after cluster of the wild vines of sin. Oh! if you are there, you must be gathered with the rest, cast into the winepress of the wrath of God, and oh! how tremendous will that be, when He who once tread the winepress for His people, shall come to tread the winepress of His wrath for the last time!

How dreadful when, to use the prophetic words of the Revelation, the blood flows forth even unto the horses' bridles! Oh! tremendous vengeance of an incensed God, whose mercy has been despised and whose grace has been put away!

I am not in the habit of often using such strong words. I rather love to plead the love of Jesus Christ to souls, but strong words must sometimes be used, or slumbering souls will never else awake. Why will you perish? Do you choose your own destruction? Wherefore do you choose it? Come, let a brother lead you back. Here, in these seats, cover your eyes, and let the silent confession go up to heaven. Look to Jesus crucified. Fly to those dear wounds of His. A Substitute for sinners, there He hangs, and bleeds, and dies.

*“There is life for a look at the Crucified One;
There is life at this moment for thee,”—*

if you believe in Him. God give you the grace to believe, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

ROMANS 3:19-31; 4:1-21

Romans 3:19-20. *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them 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 there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

The law can convict and condemn, but it can never justify the guilty. Its special work is to prove that they are not justified in sinning and to stop their mouths from uttering any excuse for their sin.

21-24. *But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:*

Now there comes in a new principle—the principle of grace, which accomplishes what the law never could accomplish—that is, the free justification of all the guilty ones who believe in Jesus. And this justification is a righteous one, seeing that it is based upon “the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:”—

25-27. *Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith.*

Faith's empty hand receives the free gift of grace and that very fact excludes all boasting.

28-31. *Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.*

Romans 4:1-8. *What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.*

There is a special blessedness, therefore, which comes to those who, by faith, are under the dispensation of grace. It came to Abraham and it came to David—yet both Abraham and David were circumcised men belonging to a special race. So the question naturally arises,—

9-12. *Comes this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: and the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.*

The historical argument is a very forcible one. The blessing was not given to Abraham as a circumcised man, but as a believing man. And hence it also comes to all of us who believe. What a mercy it is that there is, in this sense, no distinction between Jew and Gentile now!

I hate that plan of reading the Scriptures in which we are told, when we lay hold of a gracious promise, “Oh, that is for the Jews.” “Then I also am a Jew, for it is given to me.” Every promise of God’s Word belongs to all those who have the faith to grasp it. We who have faith are all in the covenant and are thus the children of faithful Abraham—so be not afraid, you who are the true seed, to take every blessing that belongs to your father Abraham and to all the seed.

13-14. *For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of no effect:*

But that would also make void circumcision and the whole of the ancient covenant, seeing that the blessing was given to a man whom God had chosen before his circumcision, and before the ceremonial law had been promulgated.

15-17. *Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (as it is written, I have made you a father of many nations,)*

Not a father of one select race of people only, but a father of all who, in any land and speaking any language, are believers in the glorious JEHOVAH, who is the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.

17. *Before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.*

Abraham was a believer in the God of resurrection, expecting to see Isaac raised up from the dead if he did actually offer him as a sacrifice to God. He was a believer in things that were not yet apparent to him, looking forward to them, and expecting to see them in due time—believing in them because he believed in God, who “calleth those things which be not as though they were.”

18-21. *Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.*

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