



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 1:8-17

"The Gospel that Paul Preached"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Now for the Scripture reading this morning, as we continue our exposition of Paul's letter to the Romans, we're turning to the 1st chapter and reading verses 8 through 17.

Romans 1, verse 8 through verse 17.

Last Sunday morning for a few of you who were not here, we began the studies in Romans by preaching on the topic, "The Jesus or the Christ Whom Paul Preached" and this morning, the topic is, "The Gospel that Paul Preached." And so, we begin at verse 8 and will center our attention in the exposition on the last two verses of this particular section.

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was prevented thus far,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles. (Incidentally, that

expression "but was prevented or hindered thus far" may be a reference to Satanic hindrance, because in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, the apostle refers to a hindrance in the ministry of the word given to him and there traces it to Satan. Some, however, think in the light of the fact that Paul does not mention Satan here that the hindrance arises from other sources. Some even suggesting, because he was doing some good work where he was, he was hindered from visiting the Romans. But, it probably is safest to say that since the expression is so similar, it does refer to the same thing. One cannot, however, be absolutely sure of that. Now in the 14th verse, the apostle writes,) I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel (The words "of Christ" are not found in our older manuscripts and probably are not genuine here, but there is no question about it being the gospel of Christ. He has already made mention of that in an earlier verse, the gospel of his Son. So we can read it that way, but the apostle wrote, I think, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel): for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For in it is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, "The just shall live by faith."

You recognize that last text, which Paul has introduced in support of the orthodoxy of his preaching, that it is from Habakkuk chapter 2 and verse 4, "The just shall live by faith." That really is the gospel that Paul preached. Let's bow together in our morning prayer.

[Prayer removed from audio]

[Message] The subject for this morning, as I mentioned in our Scripture reading is, "The Gospel that Paul Preached." Listening to contemporary Christian ministers, to contemporary Christian theologians, and to contemporary Christian philosophers, and psychologists of religion, and other Christian leaders, one might have expected from Paul, in his greatest expression of truth, the

Epistle to the Romans, in view of the problems of the city of Rome, a Christian social manifesto. Rome was a city of slaves, but the apostle did not preach against slavery. Rome was a city of lust and greed, but the apostle does not direct his greatest darts against lust and greed. It was a city of violence, but the apostle does not direct his armor against violence. The apostle preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In fact, I think that if you look at the Apostle Paul, you would gain the impression that to make the gospel a kind of morale builder or to make it the bulwark of democracy, whether British or American, to make it a lever for social regeneration, or as one is tempted to add, one commentator has said, "as a theological aspirin guaranteeing peace of mind" is to distort the message that the Apostle Paul preached. The thing that characterizes the message of the Apostle Paul is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and it is directed toward man's basic and fundamental need.

Everything else is an anemic and pallid Christianity and is really the cause for the difficulties that face the Christian church today. The Christian church is not endangered primarily by the secularism of the world, by the social wrongs that exist outside of the church; the greatest danger to the Christian church is the reduced Christianity that is within it. And if one reads the New Testament and the Apostle Paul carefully, he will notice where the apostle directs his principle: exhortation.

I think that it is a modern treachery to commend the gospel as primarily a doctrine designed to give us a 20th Century social manifesto. No one doubts that through the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ there have been great social results. And I think that we all would grant that if we will study Christianity, we would come to the conclusion that the evangelicalism that is taught in the Bible has been the greatest source of social reform throughout the world. But, the apostles and our Lord Jesus Christ did not direct their message to those secondaries.

They directed their message toward the primaries. They spoke about the doctrine of divine election. Yes, divine election. They spoke about man's sin, about man's guilt, about man's condemnation. They spoke about the cross of Jesus Christ. They spoke about his death, his burial,

his resurrection. They spoke about the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the saints sanctifying them constantly. And they also preached with great stress upon the Christian's hope of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. They did not hesitate to preach the kingdom of God upon the earth, but it was the kingdom of God not the kingdom of man. And so, they centered their attention on the primaries, these primary things. And, I think, in all true preaching of the word of God, we must center our attention upon the primaries.

Now the center of Paul's message was Romans chapter 1 verses 16 and 17 in its concepts. For there, the apostle says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." That's the center of the Pauline message.

I know that commentators tell us that this is the center of the Epistle to the Romans. Some go further and say it's the center of the apostle's message, not only Romans, but his whole thought. It's fair, I think, to suggest that it is the center of the whole of the Bible, because the apostle derived this from Genesis chapter 15:6 and Habakkuk chapter 2 and verse 4, which is built on that Genesis passage, and the apostles refer to this text several times in the New Testament. And so, it would be fair to say that in this statement, "The just shall live by faith" we have something of a summary of the principle teaching of the word of God.

We know the great effect that it has had upon our western civilization. One of the students of Romans chapter 1 has suggested that we visit a couple of interesting European libraries. The first, the convent library at Erfurt in Germany, and there we are shown an exceedingly interesting and famous picture. It represents Martin Luther as a young monk of 24 years of age. It's early in the morning and he's pouring over a copy of the Scriptures and there is a bit of broken chain hanging off of that copy. The dawn is stealing through the open lattice and the sunlight flashes upon the face of Luther and upon the face of the open Bible. And on the page that this young monk is so intently studying are to be seen the words, "The just shall live by faith."

And then this author suggests that we make another little trip to another library, the Library of Rudolstadt, also in Germany, and there in a glass case, there is discovered a manuscript that's very fascinating, so this man suggests. It's really a letter in the handwriting of Dr. Paul Luther, who was the youngest son of Martin Luther. And, he writes about how Luther in the year fifteen hundred and forty-four told him and others about how he had made his journey to Rome and how he had, in that city, through the spirit of Jesus Christ, come to the knowledge of the truth of the everlasting gospel. And the Reformer's son continues in that particular letter to say that when he was there, he went to the Cathedral Church of St. John of Lateran.

I'm sure that many of you in this audience who have traveled to Rome have been to that particular famous church. In it there is a staircase built in three sections. The center is the section up which the Pilgrims travel when they come and on the side there are two parallel staircases that people may walk up and down. As you look at the central staircase, the Pilgrims are making their way up on their hands and knees, climbing very painfully, step by step, this long staircase and as they make their way up, they recite their prayers. On two or three of the stairs, there's a covering of plate glass through which can be seen some red stains. And, according to tradition given there, it is that these stains are from Pilate's Hall in Jerusalem and are ultimately from the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, of course, it should go without saying that there is no support from archeology, or history, or any other science of that particular claim, but that's the tradition. Hundreds and hundreds of years after the time of Christ, the crusaders went off the Holy Land and every one of them was supposed to bring back some relic or other from the land of Palestine. So many pieces of the true cross of Jesus Christ were brought back that one of the high church dignitaries felt it necessary to say that the cross had the power of multiplying itself [Laughter]. Others have made the comment that if all of the pieces of the cross were put together in those western lands, there would be enough for an entire forest, but we know that these traditions are not valid.

Now in the case of this particular tradition, there is no validity probably for this tradition that Luther discovered justification by faith as he was making his way up the stairs of that particular

church in the city of Rome, that Cathedral Church of St. John of Lateran. The facts are probably this, that Luther was lecturing in the year fifteen fourteen on the Psalms, and he had a lecture on Psalm 71 and verse 2, in which it is said, "Deliver me in Thy righteousness." And as a result of pondering that expression, which was so contrary to Luther's idea of righteousness (I'll say more about this later), he came to an understanding of that text, "The just shall live by faith."

But, anyway, tradition is to the effect that when Luther arrived in fifteen eleven, he was making his way up those stairs of the church in Rome and suddenly in the midst of it, the text came to him, "The just shall live by faith." And he leaped to his feet and went on his way rejoicing because there he had finally come to understand that a man was justified not by penance, not by monkery, not by all of the works of self-denial that he was doing, but rather through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. He ceased his prayers. He returned to Wittenberg and took this as the chief foundation of his doctrine.

Well now, that is tradition, but the idea back of it is probably true. That is, it was justification by faith that turned the world upside down through the preaching of that Augustinian monk, Martin Luther. And here, in these verses that we're going to look at is the concentration, the epitome of that particular doctrine. As I said, one of the commentators has said, "This is the text of the Epistle to the Romans and it might well be called a summary of the teaching." But before we look at it, I want to say a word or two about verses 8 through 13 in which Paul expresses thanksgiving for the Romans and a desire to visit them.

These opening verses are a kind of proem, a kind introduction. A kind of opening song addressed to the Romans and it really is given in an answer to an unspoken question. Why the apostle to the Gentiles had never visited the largest and most significant Gentile city of the time, the city of Rome. They would have been puzzled by that because they had heard that Paul claimed to be *ethnon apostolos* or the "Apostle of the Gentiles." Well, if Paul is the Apostle of the Gentiles, why should he not visit the most significant Gentile city in the whole of the Roman Empire, the city of Rome? And so, Paul answers that unspoken question in these opening verses.

He also expresses thanksgiving, you'll notice, for their faith. He says, "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world." Now thanksgiving is an acknowledgement of a benefit. Whoever thanks God for faith acknowledges, therefore, that it is a benefit and, furthermore, that it is a benefit conferred by someone else. And in this case, when a person thanks God for the faith of individuals, he is acknowledging that that faith is a gift of God. So the very fact that he says, "I thank my God for your faith" is an evidence of the fact that he believed that faith was a gift of God.

Now it is true that we exercise faith, but we exercise faith because God has already wrought in us so that our faith is the product of a sovereign God. This, I say, is the kind of doctrine that these people that listen to the radio broadcast like to hear. They like to hear free grace. It is the doctrine that is found in the word of God. I was just kidding, Mr. Prier a moment ago, of course, because men don't like to hear this. It is a condemnation of their own self-righteousness, but the apostle was a person who preached the sovereign grace of God.

Now coming to the 14th and 15th verses, he expresses his obligation to preach the gospel. He says in the 14th verse, "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians." And, incidentally, he says that he is a debtor to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; to the wise and the unwise not in a very general sense.

Now it is true that once we have the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are expected to proclaim the message that we have. There are many exhortations in the word of God that we are to be servants and witnesses and, therefore, we do have an obligation to preach the gospel. All those who believe in the sovereign grace of God believe in evangelistic preaching of the word of God because it is something implanted in the heart of a believer to desire that others come to understand the free grace that has meant so much to him.

But that is not really the reason why the apostle says he is a debtor. He's not speaking generally. He's speaking specifically. He's speaking as a person who ministers a gospel that he calls "his gospel." He also speaks as the "apostle of the Gentiles," he will later point out. So when he says

that he is a debtor to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, he is speaking about his obligation as the apostle of the Gentiles. It is his specific responsibility to preach the gospel to the Greeks and to the Barbarians because he is the apostle of the Gentiles.

It is very important in reading the word of God to be sure to look at the context in which the statements are found. And here we gain the special force that the apostle desires to communicate when he says, "I am debtor." But, I don't want to avoid the implication that anyone who has come to know Christ feels a sense of obligation and responsibility to communicate that. It's one of the tests, I think, that we may apply to our own faith. We say that we are believers in Jesus Christ, that we have a desire to proclaim that gospel. Is it something that is, in a sense, laid upon us to communicate it? If we don't have any desire, we may have reason to question our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ because that kind of faith does desire to communicate the truth to others. The apostle felt that he was a debtor and so should we.

I had a friend many years ago who was a ballet dancer and she had become a Christian. And she was trying to do her best to witness to some of her friends and she was doing some dancing with another friend. And in the midst of it, I presume, while they were resting, she stopped and began to speak to her about Christian things. Well, she was a member of a particular church, but in the course of the conversation, so my friend said, because she came to me for an answer, she said to me that I shouldn't try to communicate the gospel to her and she gave a text in support of it. And the text was, "Let not your left hand know what your right hand is doing." [Laughter] She said, "Dr. Johnson, is that a text against evangelism?" "No. It's not a text against evangelism," in case you wanted an answer.

The apostle says that he is a debtor because he is an apostle to the Gentiles and, therefore, he says in the 15th verse, "I am ready." These two confessions are at the heart of all work for God, "I am debtor" and "I am ready"; obligation plus volition. We come now to the two verses that are some important. Luther, when he wrote his commentary on the Psalms, and when he came to Psalm 71:2 [transcriber's note: Psalm 31:2], "Deliver me in Thy righteousness," he made reference to the



Epistle to the Romans. And he said, concerning this particular passage there, "*Haec est conclusio totius Epistolae S. Pauli ad Romanos*", which means, this is the conclusion, a kind of summary, of the whole Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romans, "The just shall live by faith."

Now we want to notice one thing, I think, that is important. Notice that the 16th verse begins with a "for", "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Now that explains why he's ready. He says that he's a debtor because he's an apostle to the Gentiles, but he's ready because he's not ashamed. Now that has some significance for us, I think, because Rome was the seat of World Empire. The wise and the intelligent lived in the city of Rome. It was the greatest city on the face of the earth at that time.

It's not surprising that at Rome, men and women were contemptuous of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The word of the cross, Paul said to the Corinthians, is to them that are perishing foolishness. We should not be surprised when the wise and the mighty and the noble are contemptuous of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It's natural to shrink from this incongruous message of a crucified carpenter, an executed Galilean. What we have is a very similar thing when the Apostle Peter denied that he knew the Lord Jesus Christ, the fear of opinion, the fear of society, the fear of convention, all of these things are things that affect us.

Now in case you think you are above them, have you ever had anyone come to you and say, "What church do you go to?" Oh, my, I have to tell them [Laughter], "Believers Chapel." And a look of puzzlement comes over their faces, "Is that a Methodist Church?"; "No"; "Is that a Baptist Church?"; "No"; "Is that a Presbyterian Church?"; "No"; "Well, it's obviously an off brand kind of church [Laughter] then."; "Is it something like Jehovah's Witnesses, or Seventh Day Adventists, or the People of God, or is it charismatic?" And you have to answer all of these questions and then you say to yourself, "Why do I go to Believers Chapel?" [Laughter]

Well, it is the fear of the world's opinion. It is the fear of convention. It's the fear of what society says. We don't mind if they really come right out and attack us because then we can answer them. But, when they throw their sneers and their scorn at us, it's very difficult to handle that, isn't

it? You see, the apostle says here in this epistle because he felt the same kind of thing, "I'm ready to preach the gospel to you in Rome because I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ; this gospel of the crucified carpenter, this gospel of the executed Galilean."

In a sense, when Paul says, "I'm not ashamed" this is like Luther's, "*Ich kann nicht anders*. I cannot do otherwise," which he is supposed to have said when he was at Worms at the Diet there. Someone has said, "Diet of Worms, what a diet." [Laughter] But, nevertheless, when Luther was there, you'll remember, he appeared before the authorities of his time both political and religious. And in the course of his supposedly magnificent consummation of his speaking, he said that, "His conscience was captive to the word of God and he would in captive to what the word of God said and he could not do anything else. God help me. Amen." Well those words actually are probably not said by Luther. In all of the documents that we have from that particular occasion, there is no reference to any "*Ich kann nicht anders*." But, it is the sense of what Luther was saying, "I cannot do otherwise" and this is Paul's, "I cannot do otherwise. I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."

Now he calls it a gospel or a good news. That's what gospel means something like good news. And it's not the kind of news that one says in an ordinary speaking voice. It's the kind of news that one shouts. It's the kind of thing that you might shout running out into the middle of the street so that the neighbors would hear, "The war is over" or "The baby has been born and it's a boy."

You wouldn't shout, of course, if it was a girl, but [Laughter] nevertheless, if it's a boy you would shout. No, you would shout if it's a girl too. You'd say, "The baby's born!" or you would say, "Reagan has been nominated!" [Laughter] or "God will receive you, welcome you as a sinner." So he says it's a gospel. It's good news. Anything other than this is not gospel. So when Paul talks about good news, he's talking about something that's striking, something that's important, something that we shout. And, of course, it's centered, he will tell us in other places, in the death, and burial and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's his gospel. That's the gospel of Christ, "I am not ashamed of this. I don't mind telling these Romans that Jesus Christ was a crucified carpenter. I

don't mind saying he was an executed Galilean because that highlights the reason for which he died as a sin offering."

Now why was he not ashamed of the gospel? Well, is it because he had extra strong courage, naturally? Was he a courageous kind of man? Well, evidently, he was, but that isn't what he is speaking about here for he goes on to explain why he's not ashamed. He says, "For it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." Why would a person be ashamed of a message by which a person may be saved? Why should he be ashamed of a message which has within its power, the necessary power to bring a man out of darkness into the marvelous light of the knowledge of God? Why should a person be ashamed of the gospel of Christ? Why should he not want to proclaim it on the house tops? Why should he want to beat around the bush as so many preachers of the gospel do, thinking that they must be very tactful about the presentation of the gospel? This is good news. It's something to shout out about and the apostle considers it such good news because, "It is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth." That's why it's good news. We shouldn't be ashamed of it. It's good news.

Now when he says, "It's the power of God" it's often pointed out by preachers that this word "power" is the word from which we get our English word "dynamite." And so, one gets the impression the gospel's like dynamite. It'll blow you to bits. No, that's not what is meant by this word. It means, really simply, it is dynamic. That it has an inherent kind of power, the kind of power that brings a man from spiritual death into the possession of spiritual life. We shouldn't think about an explosion except insofar as we think of it as a spiritual kind of explosion. It's the product of the working of God through the saving work of Jesus Christ. He says the gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

One asks the question right here, because Paul uses salvation in several tenses and senses, "In what sense is it used here?" Paul speaks of salvation as salvation from the penalty of sin, when we believe in Jesus Christ, the penalty of our sins is cancelled so far as we are concerned. We have a righteousness acceptable to God. He speaks of salvation as salvation from the power of sin in our

daily life. This is something that is going on constantly in the life of every believer for the sanctifying work of the Spirit, is going on at the present time in our hearts and lives. And he speaks of it also as a future deliverance from the presence of sin when we are brought into the presence of the Lord.

That's salvation too. Paul says, "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." He means that the full salvation from the penalty, the power, and the presence of sin, is to be realized in the future.

Well, in what sense is Paul using it when he says, "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation?" Well, you might say immediately, "Well, it must be in all of these senses" and, of course, it is. You will discover, however, that the apostle in the Epistle to the Romans at least uses the term salvation in this third sense more often than any other. He speaks about the ultimate salvation when we enter the presence of the Lord. Now we are not going to enter the presence of the Lord without the penalty of our sin being taken care of. And so, when he says then, "It's the power of God unto salvation" he's referring to the fullness of the salvation of God.

I always think of that old story about one of the British bishops who happened to be on a street corner while the Salvation Army was conducting a meeting in England many years ago. They used to go out, a group of them, with a little band. They would play their music on the street corners and gather people about and then when the people had been gathered about listening to the music, one of them would rise and give his testimony and preach a little bit. Perhaps some others would give their testimony. They would close the meeting. Then they would move out in the crowd and seek to lead people to the Lord Jesus Christ by personal testimony.

Well, there was a little lassie there who was rather new to the Salvation Army and she looked out and she was amazed to discover standing on the edge of the crowd a man who was in clerical garb of a British or an Anglican bishop. And so, she thought, "Well, here is surely an object for the gospel" and, of course, that would be normally true. And so, she went up to this bishop and she asked him right after meeting, "Sir, are you saved?" He looked at her and he said in a very kindly voice, "Do you mean *esothēn*, *sotheis*, or *sezōsmenos*, or *sozōmenos*?" And she looked, of course, extremely puzzled and he went on to give her a little course in Pauline theology pointing out that the Bible

speaks, and Paul speaks, of our being saved in the past. Of our having been saved, and the effects of it continuing to the present time, of our being saved at the present time, and of our hope of being saved in the future, so here referred to the aorist passive, the perfect passive, the present passive, and the future passive of the verb *σῶζω*, which means to save. And then it turned out, of course, he was Bishop Brooke Foss Westcott, one of the outstanding orthodox and evangelical Anglican bishops. Well, Paul uses it in that third sense of salvation to the fullest. That is, the full salvation that one obtains through the gospel. In the rest of Romans, he will expand what he means by gospel. It will include all that he has to say in the remaining 15 chapters of this book.

Now one might ask this question, "Why is the gospel the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes?" Well, Paul explains. He says in the 17th verse, "For in it is the righteousness of God is revealed." In other words, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation because it is through the gospel that we receive a righteousness of God. Now what that means is simply this. No one will stand in the presence of God who does not have the righteousness of God. We must, if we expect to be acceptable to God, present him with a righteousness that is absolutely perfect. The Lord Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself."

Now if that is the requirement for being saved, how many would like to stand up and say, "Well, I would be saved by that"? Have you loved the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul? If you have not from the time that you first drew a breath as a human being, you're lost. You cannot measure up to God's standard of righteousness, and, if you have not loved your neighbor as yourself, in addition, you fall under divine condemnation. And I don't imagine that anyone would like to stand in this audience and claim to have fulfilled the conditions for obtaining righteousness by one's works. The only person who has ever lived up to that is our Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Now Paul says, in the gospel, there is revealed a righteousness of God that we may possess on the basis of faith. In other words, through the gospel we may have that which God demands of us, which we cannot supply ourselves and it is received as a free gift.

The man who led me to the Lord often liked to speak about the fact that there are people who have twenty percent righteousness, and there are people who have fifty percent righteousness, and then there are people who have eighty percent righteousness. He said a convict may have twenty percent righteousness, and a man who is an ordinary citizen may have fifty percent righteousness, and then, also, there may be some ethical man who has eighty percent righteousness. But, the fact that we have these measures of righteousness does not mean that we shall be saved in that way. No man who has ever lived has ever achieved a hundred percent except our Lord.

Unfortunately, there are people who will come to the Lord God and say, 'Look, Lord, I have twenty percent righteousness myself. What I need is eighty percent. Do you mind giving me the remaining eighty percent?' And then there are some who come having the eighty percent and say, 'Now, Lord, I need a little help. So will you give me the twenty percent that I have not been able to obtain myself?' And therefore, I will have that which satisfies you."

Now the Bible teaches us something entirely different. The Bible teaches us that we don't have any righteousness. The Bible teaches us that a convict doesn't have the twenty percent that average man, Mr. Average Citizen, doesn't have fifty percent, and that ethical man doesn't have eighty percent. In fact, the Bible says, "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." In other words, we don't have anything. We are standing naked before God's judgment and the reason for that is this, God does not recognize any kind of good work that does not proceed out of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and, which is not designed to promote the glory of the triune God. How is it possible for a man who does not know the triune God, how is it possible for him to exercise a work out of faith, which he does not have? How is it possible for him to do anything to promote the glory of God? That's why the Bible says that our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. They do not measure up.

Now men have human standards for righteousness, but God does not pay attention to human standards. He has his own perfectly righteousness standards and he says, "We don't have any righteousness." There is not a man in this audience who has any righteousness whatsoever. And you may be thinking, "Well, I gave some money to my church last year." That is not acceptable to the Lord God, if it did not arise out of faith and was not designed to promote the glory of God. There may be other good works that you do according to human standards, but they are only according to human standards. If you'll examine your motives, you'll generally find that your motives were not pure. Your motives were not clean in the good works that you did. They were either designed to build you up or to gain some approbation from others. The Bible says, "We don't have any righteousness." It says that we have nothing.

But, it also goes on to say, what you do not have is available to you on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done in providing merit through the saving work that he's accomplished, through the blood that he shed. And that is available to all who acknowledge that they are sinners before God and come through the Lord Jesus Christ to receive it as a free gift. In it the righteousness of God is revealed. It is a righteousness that God approves. It is a righteousness that he provides. "It is God that justifieth (Paul will say in the 8th chapter), not man." It is God that justifieth.

Luther, speaking about this righteousness and talking about, "Deliver me in Thy righteousness," spoke about how he had always thought that righteousness was a terrible concept, because it reminded him of an angry God sitting on a rainbow who was just waiting to hurl thunderbolts of judgment against men. But then he said he began to read, "Deliver me in Thy righteousness" and other passages of Scripture, and he came to understand that righteousness was not something by which God was going judge man, but was something that he was giving man through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And then he said, he saw that this righteousness was not that which gives us our due, but that which opens the gateway into paradise. And, of course, if it is something that we cannot earn, it can only be ours by imputation. It is something that is reckoned to us by our great God in heaven.

Now Paul says that it is, from faith to faith, and for the sake of time, I will just refer you to the *Believers Bible Bulletin* where I have a little bit more explanation of that expression. Whatever it means, it means that this righteousness comes to us by faith and not by the works of the law. Now Godet used to speak about faith as being the hand of the heart; it's that by which we receive a gift from God. So this righteousness that God provides, that he approves, is something that we receive as a free gift. It's something that we cannot earn. It's something that is given to us. It's something that the world of sinners does not like, naturally, because it is an attack on their own self-righteousness. It says to them in effect, "You're lost and you must be born again."

Now in order to stress the orthodoxy of this concept, because Paul realized that there would be, no doubt, some of his readers who would be shocked to learn that a person was justified by faith and not by the works of the law. He says, "It's just as it is written, the just shall live by faith." So he uses that text analogically saying that Habakkuk wrote about this. And when you study Habakkuk, you'll learn that Habakkuk got it from Genesis chapter 15 and verse 6 where we read, "Abraham believed in the Lord and it was reckoned to him for righteousness."

This doctrine is not Pauline doctrine. It's the doctrine of Abraham. It's the doctrine of Moses. It's the doctrine of the prophets. It's the doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the doctrine of the apostles and it's the doctrine we proclaim at Believers Chapel, because it is the doctrine of all these people and we're not ashamed of it. We proclaim it as the only way of salvation and if you do not have it, you are lost, the Bible says. You are under sin, guilt, and condemnation, and we do not say to you, "If you do not receive this, you will be lost." We say, "If you do not respond to this, you will remain in your lost condition forever." The Scriptures say that just as plainly as that. So our only hope is in the gospel and those who refuse it repel God's power for salvation.

James Stalker was [a] well-known Scottish theologian. He has written some very good books and the proof that they're good is that they have been reprinted many, many times. In one of his, *The Trial and Death of Jesus Christ*, he tells a beautiful story, which he cites from a private diary. He says he remembers when he was a student referring to this individual, visiting a dying man. This man had



been in the university with his friend, but after he graduated from the university, he was appointed to a professorship of philosophy in a colonial university. And, after a few years there, he became sick and returned to Scotland in order to die. It was a summer afternoon and his friend called him and asked him if he could go out for a drive. And so, they got the carriage together and they went, and he had two other friends with him who had been visiting with him during the day. And the four of them went; the two friends in the back, and the professor and his college companion in the front.

And the man who was dying spoke about what a pleasure it had been to see his friends during the day, but finally he turned to his other friend and he said, "But, do you know what they've been doing all day?" And the man said, "I couldn't guess." He said, "Well, they've been reading to me *Sartor Resartus* and oh, I am awfully tired of it." And then turning to him with his large eyes, he said, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Jesus Christ came in the world to save sinners of whom I am chief." And then the dying man added with great earnestness, "There is nothing else of any use to me now." That is true.

There comes a time when every individual will realize that the most important thing in all the world is our relationship to the gospel of Jesus Christ. That time will come to you, if Jesus Christ does not come. You'll be on your deathbed and all of the things that you have studied, all of the things that you have done will recede into the background and the important question will be, "What is your relationship to Jesus Christ?" This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners and we are the chief of sinners. What's your hope? Is it the church? You'll be disappointed. Is it your good works? You don't have any good works. Is it your culture? You may have great culture, but it's not acceptable to God.

He says, "You must be born again." Is it your Christian works? Your baptism? Sitting at the Lord's Table? You're confirmation? Your membership? Three times over in one text, Paul says, "We're justified not by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ," Galatians 2:16. Is it your education? Saul of Tarsus was as educated as a man could be and certainly as intelligent, but he was lost. Is it your goodness? The Bible says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

There is only one thing that will help and that is the possession of the righteousness of God, which comes to us as a free gift in the good news and the good news is Christ has died. Righteousness is available. God will welcome sinners and that includes you.

The soul of Paul's message has been caught by Edward Mote in his great stanza, "My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' Name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand." Are you standing on this ground? May God help you by the grace of God to come to realize that there is no hope except in the righteousness of God available through the good news.

We invite you as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ to put your trust in him. You don't have to come down front. You don't have to pray through. You don't have to raise your hands. You don't have to write your name on a slip of paper. Within your heart as you turn to him and say, "Thank you, Lord, for dying for sinners. I'm a sinner. I receive the free gift of eternal life. The righteousness of God that God accepts that's approved by him. I take it as a free gift." You move from death to life, from darkness into his marvelous light. Come to Christ. Trust him. Believe in him. Don't leave this auditorium without faith in him. That's the fundamental fact of all human existence. May God help you to settle that question. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee and thankful to Thee. We praise Thee for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and we thank Thee for the day in which Thou didst open our minds and hearts to receive him. And, O Father, if there are some here who do not know him yet, accomplish that same great saving work in their hearts today we pray. For those who may be listening, many hundreds of people respond...

**[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]**