



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Various

“The Apostle’s Creed and Job’s Dilemma Solved”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our subject for today is “The Apostle’s Creed,” but as you will see from the exposition that follows it is not the at best 2nd century historical product that we are discussing, a product that was never seen nor confessed by the apostles of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I do not object to that creed, in fact find it quite useful in many ways, but today I want to call attention to something even more significant, namely the essentials of the way of salvation as suggested by Peter’s great confession in Acts chapter 15 and verse 11 which he makes in the name of the apostles and elders of the church in the city of Jerusalem. He says in Acts chapter 15 and verse 11, and I hope you’ll turn to that passage, “But believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”

The Council of Jerusalem which is the subject of Acts chapter 15 and which occurred about 49 AD, like many other popular church expressions is somewhat misleading. When we think of the Council of Jerusalem we should not think of a council of all of the Christian churches of that time. It was not a convention of delegates. It was a meeting of Antioch with Jerusalem. The purpose was consultation and not authoritative decree, and furthermore we might note as we read through Acts chapter 15 that the

authority that was explicit there was the authority of the apostles and elders and not the authority of the church at all. The consultation in the city of Jerusalem involved the principle of grace and human salvation, and thus strife for the grace of God is an offense as always to human pride.

When the apostle wrote to the Galatian believers in Asia Minor, he said in the 5th chapter in the 11th verse of his epistle, “And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? Then is the offence of the cross ceased.” Man likes to be able to do something for his salvation, and when he is told that he can do nothing, that he cannot earn it, the cross then becomes an offense to him. It is an offense to morality because it tells morality that works cannot justify. Many years ago one of the utterances of the man who led me to the Lord at the Urbana Conference of College Students from all over this particular continent, there Dr. Barnhouse speaking make the statement, “Character may take you to hell, but not to heaven.” He was certainly correct in that. Character cannot take you to heaven, only Christ can do that.

The cross is an offense not only to morality; it’s an offense to philosophy because it appeals to faith and not to human reason. It’s an offense to culture because its truths are revealed to the simple as he states in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 26, “Not many noble,” not many well born are converted through the preaching of the gospel. He doesn’t say, “Not any.” He says, “Not many,” and that is generally the experience of the preachers of the gospel for the simple reason that it is difficult for people who have a lot of money and a lot of class. It’s difficult for them to realize that they cannot save themselves, but must rely upon our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is an offense then to our sense of cast. God chooses the poor and humble. It’s an offense to our will because it calls for unconditional surrender. It’s an offense to pride because it reveals the exceeding sinfulness of the human heart, and it’s an offense, if I may sum it up, to the man himself because it declares him dead, and it accompanies it with the command from God, “Ye must be born again.”

One of the greatest of the evangelists who ever preached the gospel in the United States was George Whitefield, and in one of his remarkable statements, he says these things which illustrate the fact that salvation is by the grace of God. “I hope,” Mr. Whitefield said once, “We shall catch fire from each other and that there will be a holy immolation amongst us who shall most debase man and exalt the Lord Jesus. Nothing but the doctrines of the Reformations can do this. All others leave free will in man and make him, in part, at least, a savior to himself, by so come not thou near the secret of those who teach such things. I know Christ is All-in-All. Man is nothing. He hath a free will to go to Hell, but none to go to Heaven till God worketh in him; to will and to do of his good pleasure. Oh, the excellency of the doctrine of election and of the saints’ final perseverance! I am persuaded, till a man comes to believe and feel these important truths, he cannot come out of himself, but when convinced of these and assured of their application to his own heart. He then walks by faith indeed!”

Now I must say that Mr. Whitefield was surely right. As the Scriptures say, “Salvation is of the Lord.” As one reads through the Book of Acts you might think that the question of the salvation of Gentiles had been settled by what happened in Cornelius’ house described in Acts chapter 10, but that dealt with the fact of salvation and the question that arose in Antioch has to do with the method of salvation. Can Gentiles be saved as Gentiles, or must they put themselves back under the Mosaic law which we believe had been done away by the work of Christ upon the cross. So that’s the question that is brought to the attention of the church at Antioch when some men “Came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” Battles that the early church had fought up to this time were largely external. But now an internal struggle begins to take place. Is it necessary for an individual to be circumcised in order to be saved? In other words, can we be saved apart from sacramental activities? This then is domestic war in the church of Jesus Christ.

Now, of course, we have no description of the man who came down from Jerusalem. I have the feeling that they did not understand the grace of God and were really not believing Christians, although, many of the Pharisees were believing Christians. And as one reads the Book of Acts and elsewhere, that becomes very plain, although they may still have felt some allegiance to the Mosaic law as they had been taught it, nevertheless they had believed in Christ. But these men do not seem to be of that kind. They were legalists. They were gloomy, long-faced, kill joys who went around hanging gospel crape. Even Peter can be taken in by them as the Epistle to the Galatians indicates. Their doctrine is the doctrine that the ritualism of the observance of circumcision is necessary for salvation.

We don’t have that problem today. The problem has been transferred to those who think that it is necessary for us to be baptized in water in order to be saved. They had come from Judea and so they came from a place with a great name in the early church. From the church at Jerusalem or from Judea is all that Luke says. It’s often Satan’s trick to associate names with marvelous background and marvelous associations with that which is nevertheless false doctrine. In that way the simple are often deceived. But Paul and Barnabas are not simple, and so when the men came there was no small dissention and disputation with them.

One of the Greek words used here is the word from which we get the English word static. So there was quite a bit of static, and we learn from this that the Apostle Paul and others were not sentimental, namby-pamby, milky, effeminate, spineless, molly-coddling, jelly fishing men who spoke simply of love. Furthermore they were not really very sympathetic with those who attempted to cover over necessary distinctions by saying one must not judge.

I can imagine that some stood off on the side and said, “Paul is just stubborn,” but Paul sensed that there was something extremely important here, and when these men came from Judea and began to talk about the necessity of doing something in order to be

saved, he began to get doctrinal vibrations. They may have pointed to Abraham and to the Lord for they were circumcised, but Paul pointed to Abraham and the Lord as well and pointed out that Jesus was not circumcised in order that he might be justified. He was the holy Son of God, and furthermore so far as Abraham was concerned, the text of Genesis says he was justified in chapter 15 and circumcised later in chapter 17. And so obviously circumcision doesn’t have anything to do with justification.

In fact I think Paul protested for at least three good reasons. If salvation is by the law we’re under the curse of death for if a man is under the law he must keep the law perfectly as Paul puts it in Galatians 3:10, “Cursed is that man who does not continue in all things that are written in the Book of the law to do them.” So to be under the law is to be under an impossible standard for justification. “By the law,” Paul says, “is the knowledge of sin.” That was one of the great purposes of the law, to show us that we’re sinners and that we need a justification by faith. Even in Old Testament days that was the teaching of Moses and the prophets.

Further, Paul said if salvation is by works then grace is destroyed. As he puts it in Romans chapter 11 and verse 6, “If by grace, it’s no more works, otherwise grace is no more grace.” Grace and works do not go together. If we are saved by grace, we’re not saved by works. If we’re saved by works, we’re not saved by grace. In fact, if we could be justified by the law, Paul says in Galatians 2:21, “Christ died in vain.” That would have been a great blunder permitted by God if Jesus Christ’s death is not an essential for our salvation.

Well the church in Antioch felt it necessary to go up to Jerusalem to discuss the matter, and so they determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others should go up there and discuss the question with the apostles and the elders. So they journeyed and along the way they visited churches in Phoenicia and Samaria and they told of the conversion of the Gentiles and caused great joy unto all the brethren. But when they arrived in Jerusalem evidently there was not a whole lot of joy there, sour, somber,

sepulchral, sanctimoniousness was the Jerusalem church somewhat sympathetic with the Judaizers? Well Luke doesn’t tell us and perhaps we should not presume too much. We know, however, that when they came together again, there was a great deal of disputing. The whole church was present. The apostles and elders had the oversight and finally after a great deal of discussion and argument, that’s essentially what the text means in its original state, Peter stood up and gave some words which came to be the final determination of that particularly meeting of Antioch and Jerusalem. He said, according to Acts chapter 15 and verse 7, “Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.” He refers to the events that happened in Cornelius’ house, “And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;” and of course if you look back at Acts chapter 10 you’ll see that God gave them the Holy Spirit before they were baptized and not after they were baptized. Salvation is not through any kind of ordinance or sacrament. And Peter concludes in the 9th verse by saying, “And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.” Well that says it very plainly, that it’s through faith that a man’s heart is purified. That means that sacramental salvation is not that which is taught in holy Scripture.

There is a large religious organization that tells us that original sin is removed by the waters of baptism. That daily sin is removed by non-bloody sacrifice, that venial sins are removed by the oil of extreme unction, and other sins removed by purgatory. What is left for the cross of Christ where water, bread, oil and fire remove sins, what does the blood do? If so much is done by works, little is done by grace.

Well Peter’s words are certainly contrary to that. He speaks about our hearts being purified by faith. And then he deals with the question of the law. He says, “Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” We could not keep the law. Why are you anxious to put it upon the necks of these Gentiles who have been converted in the environs of the city of Antioch?

And finally in the 11th verse he comes to his conclusion and he states, “But we believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”

Sometimes individuals tell us that Peter and Paul do not really agree on spiritual things. But one can see their agreement here. It’s Paul who says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast.” And here is Peter saying the same thing, “We believe that through that grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”

Now let me point to one or two of the things that are found in this statement of Peter which I think are really important for us even in nineteen eighty-six. He says, “But we believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ,” when we talk about grace we’re talking about the principle of salvation. Listen to the apostle in 2 Corinthians 8:9, “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” Grace is the principle of our salvation. It has to do with the method whereby we are saved.

Many people think of God as a professor who gives exams to men to determine if they qualify for heaven, and that the passing mark is seventy, but if God’s passing mark is seventy, then heaven is thirty percent dirty. If the passing mark is ninety-nine, then heaven is one percent dirty. The Scriptures say, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” and the Scriptures say that we must present the Lord God with a holiness that is one hundred percent pure. We should love the Lord God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our minds, and our neighbors as ourselves. God cannot, cannot, cannot, a friend of mine has said, “Accept human righteousness.” He will not take that which has the odor of Adam and his fall in the Garden of Eden. He will only accept that which comes from the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ one in the saving work that our Lord accomplished on Calvary’s cross.

Now, he also says that faith is the means. Notice in verse 9 he said, “Purifying their hearts by faith.” In verse 11 he says, “We believe that through that grace of the Lord

Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.” So Peter, while affirming that grace is the principle of our salvation, affirms that faith is the means of our salvation. We’re not saved through sanctity of life. We’re not saved by good works. We’re not saved by culture. We’re not saved by the things that we do, even the religious things that we do. We are saved through trust in the work that Christ has accomplished for sinners when he gave himself upon the cross at Calvary as the one who had accomplished the atoning work through the shedding of his blood. There the merits of his mighty work become the foundation of our salvation. Men are dead men. They do not need instruction. They need life, and life comes only in grace from the Lord God through faith as a free gift to those who bow before the Lord God, confess their sin, and call upon him to save them from the guilt and penalty and power of sin.

Now Peter says in the 11th verse, “We believe that through that grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.” There are individuals who do not like to talk about being saved. But if there is any word that can be called a gospel word in the New Testament it is the word saved. And as far as I’m concerned, I love that word saved. We believe that through that grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved.” We shall be delivered from the guilt and penalty of our sins, “Even as they,” Peter says.

Merv Rosell used to say, “When God pardons, he consigns the offense to everlasting forgetfulness.” Forgiveness of sins, he forgets the guilt and the penalty of our sins, that’s a figure of speech, simply to say that Jesus Christ has paid for it, and having paid for our sin, we who depend upon him and lean upon him and trust, go free. As the apostle puts it in Acts chapter 13 and verse 39 in his sermon in Antioch and Pisidia, he says, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

So, then let’s sum up what we’ve been trying to say. First, we’re all familiar with the Apostle’s Creed. That, we have said, is at best a 2nd century product. This creed,

“We believe that through that grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they,” has a clearer claim to the title Apostle’s Creed than that creed. This creed, “We believe that through that grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,” is that upon which the apostles founded their doctrine.

What did they say, and what did Peter say? Did he say that we believe that through circumcision we shall be saved, even as they? Through baptismal regeneration we shall be saved, even as they, through rites and rubrics? No, he said, “We believe that through that grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.” Did Peter say but we believe through doing one’s best through turning over a new leaf, through religion, we shall be saved, even as they? No, Peter said, “But we believe that through that grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.” Did he say we believe that the morally good shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, even as they? No, he said the morally good need him. In fact moralists themselves must come to the one fountain, that fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel’s veins. This marvelous and remarkable statement affirms the fact that there is not anything in man that commends him to God as he is naturally. He must come as a sinner, confessing his sin and leaning upon the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished in the shedding of the blood on Calvary’s cross.

And so, as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, I call upon you to come just as you are, to refuse all trust in the sacraments of the church, to refuse all trust in religion, to refuse all trust in good works, to refuse all salvation by doing one’s best, by turning over a new leaf, by culture, by anything, by your education, by anything that may be a trust of man in man. Come lean upon the Lord Jesus Christ who shed his blood that sinners may be saved. When the Philippian jailer turned to the Apostle Paul and said, “What must I do to be saved?” The apostle replied, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”

And so, today in the light of Peter’s great statement, his creed, and the creed of those who were with him, for he said, “We believe,” I ask you, through the Lord Jesus Christ and as an ambassador of him, put your trust in Christ. Lean upon him. Don’t turn away from the message today without settling the question of faith in Christ. Believe in him. Bow your head at this very moment and speak to the Lord, confess your need, and confess your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and receive as a free gift on the authority of the word of God the forgiveness of sins and the status of salvation, divine salvation, joining thereby the company of the believing church of Jesus Christ.

The subject next week is “Job’s Ancient Dilemma Solved.” I hope you’ll be listening then.

NEW MESSAGE

“Job’s Ancient Dilemma Solved,” is our topic in today’s exposition of the Scripture, and it has to do with a question that has troubled some, left some curious and others totally apathetic. Who cares is their attitude and yet the question is the foremost question of life, “How can I be right before God?”

We’ll concentrate our attention on Paul’s words in Romans 3:21 through 26 and I hope you’ll find your Bible and turn there for our study. “Job’s Ancient Dilemma Solved.” Paul in Romans chapters 1 and 2 has challenged human pride with its peacock’s feathers in these chapters. He has shown convincingly man’s fatal disease of sin, sin original and total. And that which makes man so pitiful in his state is that he is for the most part blind to his sin.

Too common is the view of Spinoza, “Sin is the mere moonshine of an antediluvian Calvinism.”

The result of this is that our professing Christian churches contain the nicest, kindest people who never knew what P. T. Forsyth called “The soul’s despair or its

breathless gratitude.” When there is no recognition of sin, there is felt no need of the saving cross of Christ. The crucified Christ becomes unnecessary to the life of the church, and biblical gospel preaching is no longer heard. Spiritual death settles in the congregation

In the opinion of some modern history is rewriting the doctrine of original sin into the uneasy conscience of the human race. Some, it is claimed, are showing signs of a shaken self-confidence, disturbed by the history of the twentieth century. I hope it is so, but the evidence is not overwhelmingly convincing. In fact, it seems to me that our age might be called the “Age of Superficiality,” or the “Age of Shallowness.” If there are some who are, with Zedekiah, asking, “Is there any word from the Lord?” -- They are not easy to find.

I have a word, however! It is the word of Habakkuk, the word of Paul, the word of Augustine, the word of Luther, the word of Calvin, and the word of Whitefield and Wesley, too. In a word, it is “the gospel”

Job expressed the problem that the gospel is intended to solve in this way, “I know it is so of a truth; but how should man be just before God?” Later on in his book he wrote, “How then can man be justified with God? Or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?” The problem is a real one, no question about it, especially in the light of the statement of Proverbs 17:15, “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are an abomination to the Lord.” It is the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ that through the redemption accomplished by Him we may extol the wisdom and mercy of a God “that justifieth the ungodly” Of course, in contrast to the thought of the writer of Proverbs, who conceives of a justification of an unjust nature, this justification by God is righteous, being based on the saving and meritorious sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther’s illumination concerning the righteousness of God was put in this way by him, “I greatly longed to understand Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” Luther said,

“and nothing stood in my way but that one expression, ‘the justice (righteousness) of God’, because I took it to mean that justice whereby God is just and deals justly in punishing the unjust. My situation was that, although an impeccable monk, I stood before God as a sinner troubled in conscience, and I had no confidence that my merit would assuage him. Therefore I did not love a just and angry God, but rather hated and murmured against him. Yet I clung to the dear Paul and had a great yearning to know what he meant. Night and day,” Luther continues, “I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that ‘the just shall live by his faith.’ Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before ‘the justice of God’ had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate of heaven.”

The section of Romans to which we are turning today, Romans 3:21 through 26, gives the solution to Job’s problem and the explanation of Luther’s illumination. It contains the normative passage on the great Protestant doctrine of justification by faith. Concerning the last two verses of the section, one well known commentator has written, “It is not without reason that these two verses have been called ‘the marrow of theology.’” Another writer has said, “That there is not probably in the whole Bible a passage which sets forth more profoundly the righteousness of God in Christ.’ And yet it is so short that the statement seems scarcely to have begun when all is said, within so few lines are the most decisive thoughts concentrated!” In referring to another writer, he has said, “It is the ‘Brief summary of divine wisdom.’”

Well let’s look at Romans 3:21 through 26 and first of all Paul writes about the manifestation of justification. In verse 21 of chapter 3 he says, “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets.” Notice the relationships of justification. In the opening words of the verse, he has said,

“But now,” you can almost hear a sigh of relief, one commentator has suggested, adding, “Now, after God’s appraisal of man’s efforts to achieve some standing before him, come God’s words of relief, God’s total answer to man’s total failure.” The words, then, make the turn in the argument. The righteousness of God, which in the theme verses was said to have been “revealed,” Romans 1:17, is now said to have been “manifested.”

It is Martin Luther also who, in dealing with man’s sin and hopelessness, refers somewhere to Horace’s rule of dramatic art that a God must not be introduced into the action unless the plot has got into such a tangle that only a God could unravel it. That is the state of the plot in Romans at this point. For in chapters 1 and 2, the apostle has set forth the sin of the Gentiles and the sin of the Jews, and in chapter 3 citing holy Scripture he has proved that, “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”

The righteousness of God, Paul says in verse 21, is said to be apart from the Law, and yet witnessed by the Law and the Prophets. In other words the righteousness is not gained by legal effort, or by the works of the Law. And yet at the same time it is not contrary to the Law, for the Law did not teach that man gained life by good works, as some seem to think. Rather, the Law brought by its demands, which man could not meet, the knowledge of sin. As Paul says in verse 20 here, “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.”

The Old Testament, Paul says, witnessed to the righteousness that was apart from legal works. It taught that righteousness came by the merits of a Redeemer who justified men by faith. Read the great passages of the Old Testament like Genesis 15:6, “And Abraham believed in the LORD; and he reckoned to him for righteousness,” or Habakkuk 2:4, “The just shall live by his faith,” or the great Messianic passages in the Book of Isaiah. All these texts are used by Paul in Romans. The Old Testament sacrifices by a kind of Pavlovian conditioned reflex impressed upon the minds of the Israelites the fact that God was to be approached only on the ground of sacrifice, and that forgiveness was received only on the ground of the blood that was shed.

In verse 22 Paul speaks of the rationale of this manifestation of righteousness. He says, “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.” Further explanation is given here, Paul setting forth the rationale of the righteousness and saying it is a faith righteousness. It is given by the instrumentality of faith in Jesus Christ for all believers. That’s necessary, namely, that it be through faith and not by works, because there is no difference in the sinnerhood of all men.

And then Paul speaks of the reason for the manifestation in verse 23. “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” All men fail, for both Jews and Gentiles are sinners. The apostle’s statement that all have sinned may be taken as a reference to the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden, where all men fell in their federal representative, Adam the first.” The majority of commentators, however, take the reference to be to personal sins, suggested by the context of the preceding chapters, and I think that’s probably right.

The verb translated “come short” is in the present tense and refers to the present situation. In fact, we could render it this way, “For all have sinned and are constantly coming short of the glory of God.” What is meant by, “The glory of God?” Well, probably to the approbation, or approval, of God. Paul, of course, doesn’t say that all come equally short of the standard. Paul, of course, does not say that all come equally short of the standard. The standard is nothing less than perfection, and nothing less can pass. That means that the lack of an inch is as fatal as the lack of a foot. Thus, in the light of God’s standard, which is perfection, religion, culture, education, good works, and religious ordinances cannot save. Man is lost; his mouth is “stopped” before the demands of a just and holy Sovereign.

One commentator has contended, “That the gospel deals with the basic problem of mankind, which he defines as “deep self-doubt.” He writes, “The gospel, therefore, is dealing with something tremendously significant. It does not have to do only with what

happens when you die. This is one of the reasons why hundreds of churches today are half-empty; so many people do not know that self-worth is what the gospel is all about.”

Well, I must say, while some of his words contain a good deal of truth, there is a great deal of shallowness here. That’s the reason that the churches are half-empty. The preaching of biblical sin, wrath, condemnation, hell, and justification, regeneration, heaven, and glory has been neglected. These are the things the apostles talk about. They do not speak of “self-doubt,” “self-worth,” and “personality difficulties.” In fact, modern psychology, although it may contain some genuine insights, is entirely too superficial in its major emphases to be called apostolic. Now, to this man’s credit it should be said that he in a moment links self-worth to the gift of righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ, but it is significant that he gives his readers no solid treatment of sin and its nature in his study of these verses.

Robert Horn who has written a fine little book on justification has some healthy words that are apropos here. “Some forms of communication,” he says, “Just cannot carry the whole gospel. Some types of message may be very arresting: the speaker is bright and breezy, has a story a minute, and shows great familiarity with the Almighty. Some styles of music and singing may hold the attention with the throb of the music or the use of the voice. At best they can convey only aspects of the good news. No-one can communicate truly about genuine conviction of sin, or God as holy, or judgment, in a slick, bouncy, effervescent manner. Even if what he says or sings is true, he obscures the truth by the impression he creates. The medium belies the message. To paint only the brighter colors is exciting at first, but makes the total picture flat and insipid. With no depth of color or contrast, even the bright colors lose their glory. The gospel’s splendor disappears.” There’s a lot of truth in that which Mr. Horn has written.

Paul’s necessary and inevitable note concerning man’s state is that he is a sinner, under divine judgment. His fate is death.

Then Paul launches into a description of justification and first, he talks about the manner or principle of it. He says in verse 24 of Romans 3, “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Two words demand definition, if we are to understand the apostle here. They are the words to justify, and propitiation. The former word is often misunderstood, being given the force of to make righteous, or to be righteous. In spite of able and learned attempts to make the word mean to make righteous, it must be given the forensic, or legal, sense of to declare righteous. Thus we use the term in the sense of to declare a believer righteous by virtue of the imputation, or reckoning of the merits of the crucified Savior, Jesus Christ to him. If one looks through the Epistle to the Romans it’s clear that that’s the sense in which Paul uses the term. In fact in verse 17 of chapter 5 he even uses the expression, “The gift of righteousness.” And then in chapter 4 often uses the term, “To reckon,” or “To impute with righteousness.”

The other word, “propitiation,” may be loosely paraphrased by the word satisfaction. It may in this instance mean mercy-seat, for it is doubtful that a Jewish man could fail to make the connection, since the root was commonly used in the Old Testament for that part of the furniture of the tabernacle where the blood was sprinkled in the most holy place. Since the article is lacking from the word in Paul’s usage here, the emphasis rests upon the mercifulness of the mercy-seat. It, the cross, is a MERCY-seat, or as he has said, “Whom God hath said forth to be a propitiation,” a mercy-seat.

The apostle speaks of the manner, or principle, of justification in the use of the adverb, “freely.” It is rendered by the phrase, “without a cause,” in other places, or even “for nothing,” in 2 Thessalonians 3 and verse 8. It is clear that the word here underscores the grace that underlies God’s dealings with man in justification. In fact, the words, “by his grace,” simply emphasize and explain the adverb, “freely.” In the words of one well known commentator, they “support and confirm each other,” grace and freely. It is what the Lutheran commentator R.C.H. Lenski has called “pure, abounding, astounding grace.”

Then Paul launches into a discussion in verse 24 and 25 of the method of justification. In the course of the exposition, he refers to the instrumentality of redemption. The word Paul uses, translated “redemption” in the Authorized Version, is a beautiful intensive word. He might have used the word “lutrosis,” or ransoming, but he used apolutrosis, an intensive word which means a ransoming away. In other words, justification is not through the ransoming, but the ransoming away, which is in Christ Jesus. It suggests the fact that we shall never again come into the same slavery to sin. So to have redemption that is in Christ Jesus is a great comfort and suggestive of the security that the believer has in Christ.

To sum up Paul’s description of the method, as it is presented here, we can say that the Father provided that which was the satisfaction of His holiness and justice in their claims against man. That satisfaction was secured by the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the mercy-seat, and it was His blood that secured the redemption. And this plainly says there is no Cain-way of approach to God through human good works. Thus, it was the satisfaction of the divine holiness and its claims on man in judgment through the death of the Representative of His people that secured the redemption from the bondage of sin. It is clear that inherent in the doctrine of the atonement, as set forth by Paul here in this marvelous passage, is the affirmation of substitution, the Lord Jesus dying for his people, a penal sacrifice, he bares their penalty, and divine propitiation, he satisfies the holiness and righteousness of God and the claims that were against man.

The means of appropriation are set out in verse 25, “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.” The means of the appropriation of the benefits of the death of Christ is through faith and faith alone, not by good works, not by joining the church, not by education, not by culture, not by things that we do, but through simply receiving through faith what Christ has done for us. As one has said,

“Faith is the hand of the heart. It’s that by which we receive that which we cannot earn ourselves, but which God freely gives to those who acknowledge their need of him.

Now we look at the intent of the justification. And in verse 25, near the end of the verse, the apostle speaks of the fact that justification has to do with righteousness for sins that were done under the old covenant. He writes, “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.” In a sense we have the motive in the heart of God here for the provision of righteousness for us. And I think this is seen in several ways. In the first place, there is a manifestation of God’s righteousness in the past, “to declare his righteousness for the passing over of sins that are past.” It is clear that God has first place in the cross, not man. The big problem is not how to get man to God. The big problem is how to get a holy God to man. It’s for His propitiation due to past sins of man that Christ must die. The reference is not to the sins committed by the believer before he came to Christ, but to the sins done under the old economy, under what we might call the Old Testament age, or before Christ came. The question, “Where are the wages of sin?” no doubt constantly on the lips of the Old Testament men and women, and that question is answered here.

“For four thousand years the spectacle presented by mankind to the whole moral universe was, so to speak, a continual scandal,” someone has said. With the exception of some great examples of judgments, divine righteousness seemed to be asleep; one might even have asked if it existed. Men sinned in safety and lived to a hoary old age. Where were the wages of sin? It was this relative impunity which rendered a solemn manifestation of the righteousness of God necessary and the coming and in the cross of Jesus Christ. And the cross silenced the question forever. God does punish sin.

But Paul speaks also of righteousness for the present. He says, “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,” and then goes on to say, “To declare, I say, at this

time his righteousness.” In other words, he also is set forth for the manifestation of God’s righteousness in the present season. The Lord Jesus died for the sins of men who live in the present age, as well as those that lived in the old covenant age.

And finally Paul concludes the section with these magnificent words, “That he (God) might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” The final intention of the Father is that He might be seen to be both just and the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus Christ. The great problem, not of how to get men to God, but of how to get God to men, is solved,--and righteously. In the cross of Christ He is seen to be both light in His judgment and love in His mercy. God has been propitiated. He has been satisfied by the blood that was shed. The penalty has been paid, having been meted out upon his Son, and it’s no longer necessary to coax, cajole, and wheedle mercy out of God. God is propitious. He has been satisfied by reason of the death of Christ.

And so as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus, I call upon you in the light of the fact that God has been satisfied by what Christ did, believe him, and thank him, receiving the gift of eternal life. And when by God’s grace you have seen your state and have leaned upon Christ and what he has done, you receive freely the redemption that is in him. So, the barriers are removed in the cross, which exhibits His righteousness and yet also broadcasts His love. His redemption is not “a pity that agrees to ignore sin; but a power that cancels it and sets free from its dominion,”¹⁵ as one friend of mine has put it. In the light of this we can only exclaim: “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...”

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]