

The Miracle of Justification

By David Harrell
Romans 3:21-25a

Once again it is my great joy to be able to open up the Word of God to you this morning. I would invite you to take your Bibles and turn to Romans chapter three as we continue this amazing journey through Paul's epistle to the Romans.

After their miraculous deliverance from slavery in Egypt Moses led God's covenant people to the wilderness of Sinai. It was three months after they had been rescued from Egypt that about two million beleaguered and helpless descendants of Abraham camped at the base of Mount Sinai.

Little did they know that they were about to encounter the one true God, their Creator. According to Exodus chapter 19 we read that God called Moses up to the mountain to meet with him because he was about to give him his law. He was about to make his people a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. But before he did, the people had to prepare themselves for two full days. This was to be a time of self examination, a time to look into their heart and contemplate the toxic nature of their sin and, therefore, their utter inability to approach a holy God. This would be a time of inward cleansing that would be symbolized by outward actions of bodily cleanliness. And even at that they still would not be able to enter into the presence of God, but only be allowed to approach him from a distance.

Now this is hard to imagine in our age of grace where we are able to draw near to God through Christ, a privilege that many times we take for granted. In fact, I would humbly ask you. Have you prepared yourself spiritually to even come here to worship today? Many times people don't. For most Christians these days their attitude and, frankly, even their attire would be the same as if they were going to a sporting event. Our culture knows little of holiness. Our culture knows little of transcendence. Our culture has no respect for things that are sacred anymore.

But the children of Israel were about to encounter an unapproachable God, one that is absolutely holy, which means totally transcendent, totally other, a God, frankly, that was terrifying, the Creator God.

And in order for them to grasp the infinite chasm between their sin and his holiness and his hatred for sin, he prepares them to witness the dramatic demonstration of his majesty and the awesomeness of his power and one day the glory of his grace.

And in Exodus chapter 19 beginning in verse 10 we read this.

The LORD also said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. And you shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. 'No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be

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stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain." So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. And the LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, "Go down, warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. And also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them."

And Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for Thou didst warn us, saying, 'Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.'"

Then the LORD said to him, "Go down and come up again, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest He break forth upon them." So Moses went down to the people and told them.¹

Here we see that sinful man cannot approach a holy God. No one, the Bible says, can even look upon him and live. Why is that? Because God cannot look upon sin. It is an abomination to him.

The next thing that happens is God gives the people his law through his servants, a law that holds forth his standard of righteousness in order to demonstrate man's utter inability to live up to that righteousness. The purpose of the law was to give men, according to Romans 3:20, the knowledge of sin as we will see. In fact, the law actually stimulated sin. The Bible teaches that it actually revives sin. It does not kill it.

Paul will tell us in Romans seven and verse eight, "But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind."²

¹ Exodus 19:10-23.

² Romans 7:8.

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You see, the law actually was given to animate the sinner to more sin, because our rebellious nature will always prefer those things that are forbidden over those things that are allowed and, thus, give our rabid commitment to self will an opportunity to assert itself. But ultimately the law was given to make men conscious of their sin so that he would be prepared for the gospel. So that he would be prepared for the good news that there was a possibility of being reconciled to a holy God and enter into an intimate relationship with him, one whereby man not only would be given access into the presence of God, but think about it, the triune God would actually come and dwell within him.

Beloved, it is a miracle of all miracles to think that he redeemed us in order that he might inhabit us. And this is the essence of Paul's message in our text this morning in Romans chapter three.

Let me read the verses we will examine this morning beginning in verse 21.

But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.³

Now up to this point the apostle Paul has hammered home the point that God is holy and man is not. We are utterly sinful. He has demonstrated that man is utterly unable to save himself. He has suppressed the truth in unrighteousness even to the point where he would completely deny God's revelation of himself to man through creation and conscience. And for this reason the wrath of God abides on man.

And thus far in the midst of Paul's dramatic and gloomy depiction of our total depravity and our utter inability to please God he has given us a glimpse of hope.

For example in Romans one and verse 16 he mentions the gospel, that there is a good news coming. He speaks of it as the power of God for salvation to everyone who believers. He goes on to say, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'BUT THE RIGHTEOUS man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.'"⁴

But now, beloved, when we come to chapter three in verses 21 and following, this glimmer of hope yields to the full light of the midday sun because now he leads us to an opening in this cave of despair, this cave of hopelessness and darkness, this cavern of divine wrath. And suddenly our eyes must adjust to the light of his grace. Suddenly we come to an opening of mercy. Suddenly we are allowed to behold a vast valley of divine provision. We begin to see a way that God has provided for sinners to be reconciled to himself, where we might be able to go up the mountain and actually enter in to his

³ Romans 3:21-25.

⁴ Romans 1:17.

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presence and enjoy fellowship with him, a way whereby we could be made righteous which means to be made acceptable to God.

And Paul explains this through four elements, a way of righteousness that is, first of all, apart from the law; secondly, acquired by faith; third, it is available to all; and, finally, it is accomplished by redemption.

Dear friends, here we behold the very heart of the Christian faith. Here we behold the essence of the good news, the essence of the gospel of Christ and the blessed hope that belongs to all who have trusted in Christ alone as their only hope of salvation.

Notice how God, first of all, provides a righteousness that is, number one, apart from the law, verse 21.

He says, “But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.”⁵

The phrase, “apart from the law,” the term “apart,” *χωρις* (kho-rece) in the original language. It is a very strong term in Greek and it has the meaning of being absolutely apart from something. In fact, the same term is used in Hebrews chapter four and verse 15 speaking of Jesus, quote, “...who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”⁶ Utterly apart from sin.

So Paul is saying that God has provided for us a way to be perfectly righteous apart from, completely separate from man’s futile attempts to somehow live up to this divine standard that he gave at Sinai. Apart from all of his Legalism, apart from all of his ceremonial cleansings, apart from all of his sacrifices and sabbaths and circumcision and his rituals and so forth, even apart from his very best actions which, according to Isaiah are likened to a filthy garment in Isaiah 64 verse six referring literally to a menstrual cloth.

But now, he says, in other words, in contrast to the abysmal reality of the blackness of your sin that separates you from a holy God, “But now apart from the Law,”⁷ apart from that which you tried to obey, but couldn’t, apart from the law that exposed and inflamed your unrighteousness, God has provided a way for sinners to be righteous.

And he says that this is the righteousness of God. And notice he says it has been manifested. The grammar here indicates that it is in the perfect tense. Therefore this refers to something that has been done in the past whose effects of which will continue into the present. And what is that? What happened in the past that has an effect that continues to this day? The cross, the cross of Jesus Christ manifested some 2000 years ago, the atoning work of Jesus whose effects will last through eternity.

⁵ Romans 3:21.

⁶ Hebrews 4:15.

⁷ Romans 3:21.

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And he says that this is being witnessed by the law and the prophets.

Now, don't you know this was a hard pill to swallow for the Jews of the Church that day? When they first read this, dear people who had exhausted themselves throughout their life to obey all of these rules and regulations, yet this was not what God had provided. In fact, they are learning here that what he has provided was witnessed by the law and the prophets. In other words, the Jewish Scriptures, they had it all along.

What they are hearing here is that this is not some new novel revelation, not some new kind of righteousness previously unrevealed, but this was in the Old Testament all along. The Old Testament Scriptures never taught salvation by works, but always by faith alone.

In Genesis chapter 15 and verse six Moses spoke of Abram and he says, "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."⁸

Abram was justified by faith alone. And that happened 430 years before the giving of the law at Sinai, an argument that Paul will later make in Romans four.

And in Psalm 32 verse one David said, "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit!"⁹

And Paul will also later appeal to this very text in Romans chapter four in verse six where he will say, quote, "avid also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works."¹⁰

And did not the prophet Isaiah say in chapter 53 and verse six that, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him?"¹¹

Did the prophet not go on to also add that there would be a lamb who would be led to slaughter, who would not open his mouth, whom the Lord was pleased to crush, putting to grief the one who would render himself as a guilt offering?

All of this was in the Old Testament all along. But like us, the Jews of those days wanted to believe what they wanted to believe. They wanted to hear what they wanted to hear. And in Jesus' day they held more firmly to the myriad of man made laws and traditions that the rabbis gave them than they did to the Scriptures. They were constantly jumping through various religious hoops in order to become more righteous on their own. In fact, even many Jews who believed in Christ still insisted on transporting various aspects of the law into grace, into salvation, things like circumcision and like sabbath day restrictions and so forth. They were called Judaizers.

⁸ Genesis 15:6.

⁹ Psalm 32:1-2.

¹⁰ Romans 4:6.

¹¹ Isaiah 53:6.

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The New Testament record is filled with examples of this along with various apostolic confrontations of this error. In fact, Paul had to remind the Galatians in Galatians two verse 16 that they were “justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law since by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”¹²

So Paul begins here not only has God provided righteousness apart from the law, but, secondly, it is acquired by faith, verse 22, “even the righteousness of God,” he says, “through faith in Jesus Christ.”¹³

Now won't you notice with me, first of all, this phrase, “the righteousness of God”? You see, this is what the law was pointing to, the need for a righteousness that is not our own. It is the righteousness of God.

I ask you. Have you ever thought about where righteousness came from? How did it originate? Well, the answer is, from God. He is the source of righteousness. He is the essence of righteousness.

In fact, Isaiah tells us in chapter 45 and verse eight, “Drip down, O heavens, from above, And let the clouds pour down righteousness; Let the earth open up and salvation bear fruit, And righteousness spring up with it. I, the LORD, have created it.”¹⁴

And here Paul is telling us that this righteousness that God has created is available to man through faith in Jesus Christ.

Dear friends, it is not enough to say that I have faith in God. But you must have faith in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Be clear about that.

Jesus said in John chapter 10 and verse nine that, “I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved.”¹⁵

And in John chapter 14 and verse six he says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.”¹⁶

Why is it Jesus alone? Because he alone lived the perfect life that satisfied the perfect demands of a perfect law that we might have a perfect Savior and be made perfect through him.

He achieved what we could not do. He paid the price that we could not pay. We deserved to die. He did not. So the perfectly righteous Son of God incarnate paid in full the penalty for our sin on the cross of Calvary.

¹² Galatians 2:16.

¹³ Romans 3:22.

¹⁴ Isaiah 45:8.

¹⁵ John 10:9.

¹⁶ John 14:6.

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For this reason Paul said in Galatians chapter three verse 13, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us.”¹⁷

And for all who trust in Jesus Christ as Savior, God gives that person his righteousness and takes upon himself their sin. This is utterly inconceivable, isn't it?

I might add that this is another testimony to the inspiration of Scripture, for what man could ever have conceived of such a plan?

So this righteousness is acquired by faith.

Now I must hasten to add that I am not talking about this phony, false faith that is indicative of our culture where a man simply affirms certain facts about Jesus Christ, but has really no desire to submit his life to Christ. That is a dead faith. It cannot save James tells us in chapter two and verse 17. Jesus made it clear that not all professions of faith are genuine, right? Matthew chapter seven.

Genuine saving faith will be like a fruit tree that bears fruit. If you sell me a tree and say, “This is an apple tree,” eventually I need to see some apples. If you tell me you are a Christian, eventually we need to see some of the fruits of Christ growing on your tree. Genuine faith will yield the fruit of a transformed life devoted to God's glory. It will reveal a person who has a deep love for God and lives to his glory and also has a deep love for the lost and certainly a passionate love for other believers.

If you say you have faith in Christ and you do not manifest this in you life, you fool yourself. You will have a love for the Word of God, an appetite for it. There will be a separation from the world and an obedient to the lordship of Christ. There will be a desire to commune with the Lord in prayer. We will be able to see measurable growth in your life. You will demonstrate a burden for the lost. You will unashamedly proclaim and protect the truths of the gospel. You will be willing to suffer for it. You will manifest the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

These are the things that validate genuine saving faith whereby the righteousness of Christ is manifested in that transformed sinner.

But will you notice what else the apostle has to say about this righteousness? Not only is it apart from the law and acquired by faith, but, thirdly, it is available to all who believe, verse 22.

He says, again, “The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction.”¹⁸

Well, why would there be a distinction? Well, the reason is verse 23.

¹⁷ Galatians 3:13.

¹⁸ Romans 3:22.

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“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”¹⁹

Now here is the good news. This is exceedingly good news. As I look at my life this is really good news, because I can see sin all through my life.

You see, none of us are righteous. None of us can approach God. But no matter who we are or what we have done, we see that the righteousness of God is available to us through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Now I know, because I hear from some of you that are hearing my voice, that some of you are in prison. You have committed some heinous crime. Others, perhaps some in this room, are adulterers, fornicators, homosexuals. There are those who are pedophiles, and pornographers, prostitutes, rapists.

But isn't it amazing that the righteousness of Christ can be yours if you ask Jesus to save you? Whoever you are, the righteousness of God can be yours if you will repent of your sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is no distinction. There is no distinction between any of us. He says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”²⁰

It is interesting. Grammatically this is in the perfect tense. It could be translated, “All are constantly, continuously falling short of the glory of God.” And it is also interesting that the verb is in the middle voice indicating that the cause of our dreadful condition of sin is not because of something outside of us, but because of something that is within. It is because of our sin nature, our fallen nature that Paul has so clearly demonstrated.

I ask you. Why does a horse eat grass and a dog eat meat? Because that is their nature? Why do we sin? Because that is our nature. We prefer darkness over light. We prefer error over the truth. We prefer our sin and our rebellion over living to the glory of God.

And what is this glory of God of which we are continually falling short? Well, my friends, don't you see? It is the glory of God manifested in Christ Jesus, the sinless Son of God.

In John chapter one and verse 14 we read that the Word, referring to Jesus, “became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father full of grace and truth.”²¹

But you must understand because of our sin we are not full of grace, nor are we full of truth. Instead, we are full of rebellion and deception. So something has to be done to transform our nature.

¹⁹ Romans 3:23.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ John 1:14.

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You see, we are all in a state of falling short of that which was enjoyed before the fall, namely the unimaginable, inestimable blessings of having the approval of God, of experiencing a perfect intimate fellowship with the living God.

Because of sin, that has been destroyed, but it can be reconciled if we can have a righteousness that is not our own.

God has provided a way to change all of this, to restore that which was lost, to replace unrighteousness with righteousness. Again, Paul is saying that we can have this apart from the law. It is acquired by faith available to all who believe. But, fourthly, it is accomplished by redemption.

Here is where it gets even more exciting. Notice in verse 24 he says, “being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.”²²

My that is a mouthful, a lot of theology there.

You might be saying, “What on earth does all of that mean?”

Oh, I am so glad you asked. I am so glad you asked. How does this happen? What is the Holy Spirit saying to us through his servant the apostle Paul?

Now bear with me for a moment because I want to go from the technical to the practical. In Greek the terms righteousness and justified are practically the same word. Righteousness is the word *dikaïosunē* (dik-ah-yos-oo'-nay) and justified is the word *dikaïōō* (dik-ah-yo'-o). In fact, if you will notice, they sound the same in Greek. In fact, the first two syllables are exactly the same because they come from the same root that has to do with righteousness.

Now the term righteousness speaks of state or a condition of being acceptable to God because of perfect integrity, because of absolute purity and virtue of life. In other words, the righteous could ascend the mount. The unrighteous cannot. And the word “justified” means literally to render righteous or to declare or pronounce one to be righteous. That is the technical.

Now let's go to the practical. Paul is telling us that sinners can possess this righteousness of God. In other words, you can be made acceptable to God and this is done by this justification. He says by being justified, in other words, declared righteous as a gift by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

Now practically how does this work? This idea of being justified freely by his grace. What is God tell us here?

²² Romans 3:24-25.

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We must understand that justification is a forensic term. It is a legal term. It is used in a legal sense. And, again, it means to declare or pronounce a man righteous.

Now, this poses a huge problem in human terms because when a man is convicted, when a criminal stands before the bar of justice, the only way that he can be justified, the only way that he can be declared righteous would be to be found not guilty and therefore be declared a righteous man.

But how can a man who is guilty be declared not guilty? Are you with me so far? It is a big problem, isn't it?

Now, a man can be pardoned, but that is all together different than being justified, than being pronounced or declared as completely totally righteous. And in our case Paul has just declared the bad news that all have sinned. So the verdict is in. We are all guilty. Big problem.

So how can we be declared righteous?

Ah, dear friends, here is the miracle of justification. There must be a supernatural legal transfer of guilt from one to another. There has to be a transaction that could never happen in a human tribunal. And here is how God has accomplished this.

In order to understand it, I wish you would place yourself before the holy tribunal, standing there in the filthy rags of your very best works, guilty. But then suddenly another man comes and not only changes places with you, but actually—now catch this—becomes you. Moreover, this man is totally righteous. He is utterly sinless. Yet he is not only willing to take your punishment, but to assume your guilt.

But if that is not good enough, this innocent man has given you his sinless righteous character.

Beloved, this is what Christ has done for all who will believe. You see, he stands in your place and he says, "Holy Judge, punish me for I have taken this man's sin upon me. I will pay his penalty in full. Moreover, I have given him my righteousness that he might be justified, declared righteous. By the way, this does not mean, Judge, that you can now treat him as righteous even though he is still guilty. This does not mean you can consider him to be righteous although he is still guilty. But, Judge, this means that this man is actually made righteous. Father, declare this man as righteous as if he has never committed a single sin. Wipe the slate clean. Everything that he has done in the past and the present and in the future. It is all wiped out. Again, this is not merely a pardon. No, this is exceedingly beyond just being forgiven, because the slate is perfectly clean. And therefore, Father, because of this, now he can stand in the presence of your glory blameless with great joy."

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Oh, child of God, don't you see it? The penalty for sin is still paid, but not by the one who committed it, but rather by the one who is totally innocent.

Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians five verse 21, "He made Him," referring to Jesus, "who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become [what?] the righteousness of God in Him."²³

Again, this is far more than pardon and this is exceedingly more glorious than even being forgiven. This is the miracle of the justification by grace.

The next time you give your testimony don't merely say, "My sins have been pardoned, because of Christ my sins have been forgiven." And, indeed, that is true. But don't stop there. Go to the full extent of this glorious theology. Declare the most amazing truth of all and say that I have been justified, I have been declared righteous as a gift by his grace.

Now you ask, "How can I be justified?"

Again, notice. It says it is "a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."²⁴

I love the old King James Version. It says, "Being justified freely by his grace."²⁵

"Freely" is a Greek term *dwrean* (do-reh-an'). It means freely, but also it could be translated "without cause, without a cause, undeservedly." In fact, Jesus used the same term when he said in John 15:25, "They hated me [*dwrean* (do-reh-an')] without a cause."²⁶

So here we can read Paul's statement similarly. He is saying, "Being justified without cause." It is a gift to all who believe.

My friends, this is how we receive the righteousness of God. And notice he says it is through redemption. What is redemption? *apolutrwsiv* (ap-ol-oo'-tro-sis) in the original language, an amazing word. It means to redeem or to deliver. It speaks of a releasing or a liberation affected by a ransom payment.

It was often used to describe paying a ransom to set a prisoner free or a slave free from his master.

Now what was the ransom used? Verse 24 at the end he says it is "the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith."²⁷

²³ 2 Corinthians 2:21.

²⁴ Romans 3:24.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ John 15:35.

²⁷ Romans 3:24-25.

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My, here is another magnificent word that every believer should be intimately familiar with. Propitiate, *ilasmov* (hil-as-mos'). It means to placate. It means to appease. It means to satisfy. *ilasthrion* (hil-as-tay'-ree-on) is the term that is used in the original language that speaks of that which satisfied or that which propitiates. It refers literally to a sacrifice of atonement.

Let me give you the history of this concept. In the Old Testament the tabernacle and then the temple there was an inner sanctuary, the holy of holies. No one could dare draw near that inner sanctuary because it housed the ark of the covenant. The only person that could enter in would be the high priest one time per year on the Day of Atonement.

And inside this holy of holies was this ark of the covenant. It was a box made of gold and in it it contained the law that Moses received on Sinai. And above the ark and on each end were these magnificent golden cherubs with outstretched wings guarding the holiness of God symbolically. And between the cherubs would hover the shekinah glory of the living God, the light of his presence, a light too brilliant to be seen by sinful eyes.

But there was a lid on top of this ark and it was a golden lid that separated the law within which had been violated from the presence of God which hovered above, because, again, we see symbolically that God's holiness can never be contaminated by sin.

But, dear friends, the golden lid of separation had staggering implications for every sinner who wants to be reconciled to God because on that lid divine justice and grace came together symbolically when the high priest would sprinkle the blood of an animal once per year to make atonement for the sins of Israel.

That lid was called the mercy seat. And in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament the mercy seat is translated *ilasthrion* (hil-as-tay'-ree-on), the place where the just wrath of God was symbolically propitiated, where his vengeance upon sinners was temporarily placated.

In Exodus chapter 25 verse 21 we read, "You shall put the mercy seat [again, the *ilasthrion* (hil-as-tay'-ree-on)] on top of the ark [God says], and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I shall give to you. And there I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak to you about all that I will give you in commandment for the sons of Israel."²⁸

Dear friends, I hope you see. This is an amazing picture of divine propitiation, of mercy and grace and love coming together, one that pointed to the Lamb that would one day come and once for all make a sacrifice that would satisfy, that would propitiate the just wrath of God upon a sinner.

²⁸ Exodus 25:21-22.

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Beloved, central to God's redemptive plan was this perfect propitiation, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only one who could meet the demand of God's holy law as well as the demand for justice.

You see, all of this was pictured in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. In fact, John tells us in 1 John 2:1, "And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins"²⁹

Oh, dear friends, what a magnificent gift. This is so amazing to think that the moment we believe in Jesus Christ our sins are imputed to him. They are no longer ours. They are cast upon his shoulders. No longer does the divine justice of God see us as guilty, but as righteous and at the moment of new birth, think about it, the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us and declared as ours that we might be acceptable to God, that we might enter into a relationship with him, that we might not only go up to the mountain, so to speak, and enter into his presence, but that he would actually come and dwell within us because, again, remember that he redeems us that he might inhabit us. We become his temple all because of Christ.

One moment we are under divine wrath and the next moment God looks at us in the same way that he would look upon his dear Son. And may I add that this justification is permanent? Christ will never reverse this. He will never do something to somehow reverse this miraculous exchange.

To say that a man could lose his salvation is to say that he committed some sin for which Christ's righteousness is somehow insufficient to cover. It would also imply that although God can perform this miracle of divine replacement, man, if he chooses to, can undo the whole thing.

My friends, that is not the God of the Bible. This theology is errant. It is foreign to Scripture. Do you really think that we could do something that would force God to retract this righteousness that has been given to us through Christ and then punish man?

No, once the act of divine justification has occurred the Bible tells us that it is eternal. The ransom was paid in full. We are given eternal life.

I close this morning by quoting Charles Spurgeon who spoke of this several hundred years ago in London and, as always, he speaks with such profundity that I think that this is a perfect way to summarize what the Spirit of God would have you understand this morning.

He said this. Quote, "The way whereby God saves a sinner is not, as some say, by passing over the penalty. No, the penalty has been all paid. It is the putting of another person in the rebel's place. The rebel must die. God says he must. Christ says, 'I will be substitute for the rebel. The rebel shall take my place. I will take his.' God consents to it.

²⁹ 1 John 2:1-2.

The Miracle of Justification

By David Harrell

Romans 3:21-25a

No earthly monarch could have power to consent to such a change, but the God of heaven had a right to do as he pleased. In his infinite mercy he consented to this arrangement. ‘Son of my love,’ said he, ‘you must stand in the sinner’s place. You must suffer what he ought to have suffered. You must be accounted guilty just as he was accounted guilty. And then I will look at him as if he were Christ. I will accept him as if he were my only begotten Son, full of grace and truth. I will give him a crown in heaven and I will take him to my heart forever and ever,’” end quote.

Dear friend, if you are hearing me today and you have never placed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you know your guilt. You know it as sure as I am standing here. The verdict is in and you know it in your heart because you feel the pain of conviction in your conscience and I plead with you this day as a minister of the gospel that you will cast yourself upon the mercy of Christ today. Take hold of the gift of justification, this magnificent exchange whereby you can have the righteousness of Christ and he will take upon himself your unrighteousness. And in so doing you will go away today rejoicing knowing that you have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

May God’s grace make it so.

Let’s pray together.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths that ignite our hearts to praise. Oh, God, only you could conceive of such a plan. Moreover, only you could fulfill it. Lord Jesus, we praise you for your sacrifice on our behalf. May we live to your glory. May sinners be saved because of the truths that have been proclaimed today for the sake of the kingdom and for the glory of Christ.

And all God’s people said amen.

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