

Righteousness From God

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon emphasizes the righteousness from God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ, which is the basis of Christian assurance.

Duration: 39:07

Scripture: Isaiah 64:6, Matthew 6:33, Romans 3:21-24

Topics: "Righteousness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the universal predicament of the human race, highlighting the failure of all people to produce the righteousness required by God's law. He divides mankind into three categories: the pagan populace, the moralists, and the Jews, and charges them all with ungodliness and unrighteousness. The speaker emphasizes that no one is right with God by nature and that all are under the judgment of God. However, he introduces the good news that a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, offering salvation to all who believe.

Transcript

The theme of our meditation this morning as we come toward the table of our Lord you will find best expressed in Romans chapter 3 verses 21 to 24 and particularly the phrase in verse 21 which goes a righteousness from God a righteousness from God let me read to you the three verses again but now says Paul a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe there is no difference for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ this is one of the most remarkable passages in the whole of the New Testament probably because it contains so much of the gospel within the compass of but a few brief verses however we are not going to look at it as a whole this morning but simply at one main thought that is brought out here and in order to see that and appreciate that we have to see it necessarily in its God-appointed context. The Apostle is speaking here of the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ he is writing about the righteousness that has come from God against the background of his elaborate description of human unrighteousness and of the total incapacity of the human race to produce righteousness that would qualify any man any woman anywhere to be acceptable before God. Those of you who are familiar with the epistle to the Romans will remember that in the first three chapters coming up to this very point the Apostle has been at pains to elucidate what from the divine vantage point is the predicament.

You will pardon me I'm here to the cold that is around too so if I have some odd coughs just bear with me. He has been describing the amazing predicament of the human race the universal predicament of the race and he has been doing so by putting in turn all kinds of people the three divisions of mankind as it were into the dock in the court. He has been charging them and finding them guilty of failing to produce the righteousness which the lawgiver requires.

It's a very elaborate exposition of the truth of human sin and of unrighteousness but I just want to summarize it briefly in order for us to appreciate the good news that he announces in our text but now he says quite excitedly a righteousness from God quite apart from law has been made known. Now you and I are not going to catch the joy of that the thrill of that and we are not going to be able to celebrate the wonder of it at the Lord's table or now as we wait upon his word unless we get the context clearly. The Apostle Paul has been as we have said arraigning the three main sections of the society of his day and charging them with failure to produce righteousness before God.

No man no woman says Paul is right with God all men everywhere are wrong in spirit in attitude in the matter of guilt in the matter of shame in the matter of what we've done as well as what we thought and desired we are wrong with God things are wrong between us and God no one is right with God by nature. Now first of all he speaks of the entire pagan populace of his day and he shows us that the entire pagan world stood under divine condemnation. The reason? He pinpoints the two things their ungodliness and their unrighteousness.

There is a wrong attitude towards God and there is a wrong attitude towards men. They are not right with God they are not right with one another. Well did they not have any light? Did they not know what was right and wrong? Did they not know how to be right with God? How to be right with one another? Well says Paul the tragedy is they had knowledge and all men today have a certain knowledge of God but the knowledge they had they suppressed they sat on it they squashed it they did not obey it they did not receive it they did not welcome it they did not apply it they sat on it and they refused it they suppressed it they held it down.

There are certain things says Paul that can be known about God from the starry heavens above from the creation that he has made from the rhythm of the seasons and much else even he says his eternal power and Godhood. Certain things can be known but the light they had they just did not receive they didn't live by it and so their foolish hearts were darkened and they just went more and more into a life of rebellion and unrighteousness. And then you have that awesome catalog of sins at the end of Romans chapter 1 which we blush to read.

All because says Paul the pagan communities of his day and age refused to receive the light they had and so they became guilty before God subject to his condemnation and wrath because they refused the light they had they did not live up to it. Any Brits in the dark folk whom the some theologians and others have referred to as the pagan moralists of that day and age. There were some among the pagans who apparently had a sense of right and wrong and even presumed that they could put society politically and otherwise in its place.

They judged what was right and wrong there were people like Seneca for example just to mention one name who was always on the alert to see evidences of hypocrisy of false dealings and he spoke up and he wrote. In other words you see there were some among the pagans who had received some measure of the light they had and the light of reason that they had and on the basis of this light they had judged that

certain things were right and certain things were wrong. Their standard of judgment may not have been what we have in the New Testament nor even what you have later on in some parts of the Old Testament but there was a right and wrong as far as they were concerned and they judged society they judged the politicians they judged religious people they judged everyone but says Paul here is the rub they had enough light to judge other people but they did not live up to the light they themselves had telling other people to be honest they were dishonest themselves telling other people to speak the truth they were not speaking the truth themselves so that the most moral among the pagans was self-condemned before God they showed that they had light to judge others but they did not live up to the light they had they too clever though most of them were they too were under the condemnation of God.

There is a third division very familiar to us all the people of the Jews they were the most favored of all peoples among mankind they had the law of Moses in their hands they had the teaching of the prophets they had been nurtured on these things for for years and years of time so that they had a tradition of what was right and wrong nevertheless says the Apostle Paul we too or he was among them we too are guilty before God for the light that came to us from the law and from the scriptures as well as from nature outside and our consciences and our reasons inside of us the entire spectrum of divine light we have rejected and we're not living up to it and so Paul comes to that tremendous statement where he says that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God there is no difference

he says between the pagans and the moralists and the religious Jews who reject the totality of the light that God has given to them all in one way or another have suppressed the light they have and they've not been able to live up to it let alone to the full glare of divine requirements revealed in his son Jesus Christ in some measure or other they all knew that God required something but they didn't produce it all were unrighteous all were without the righteousness that God required and brothers and sisters still requires all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and there is no different now that's the background this threefold charge leads Paul to that bold affirmation that there is no difference whatsoever so that the just condemnation of God rests upon all men alike there is

no hope of salvation from man himself whether it be the pagan or the moralists or the Jews we cannot save ourselves we are under the judgment of God now so what so what my friends so what now this divides us into two if we are Christian men and women who have discovered the message of the gospel for ourselves and have begun to experience it it's at this point we begin to get excited O loving wisdom of our God when all was sin and shame a second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came when we were incapable of producing righteousness God took the initiative he didn't consult us he left us in our sin to wallow and he wrote he performed the whole thing himself he was the architect of the plan he was the originator of it it began in his own heart in his own mind and he did not consult one

solitary human being philosopher or otherwise and he devised a means to bring back to him his banished ones a way of salvation and this is what Paul is announcing that which neither pagans nor moralists nor Jews can produce but now he says a righteousness from God coming down from heaven to earth an imported righteousness has been made known and it is freely imparted to those who believe in his son Jesus Christ our Lord it's all here it is ready-made and it is brought into the realm of our experience made possible by the death and resurrection of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ now the main doctrine that the apostle is referring to here of course is the doctrine of justification when we talk of it in those terms it can it can be a little bit forbidding to some people who are not familiar

with these terms but let me just say this much about it justification or the concept of a righteousness from God justification is a term that was normally used in the law courts of the day especially in Roman law courts though not exclusively I understand it is a forensic word and it was used to describe a judge's acquittal of a person someone has been charged with some offense or other and when the evidence has been heard the judge acquits him and says not guilty and the term this term was used the judge justified him but you notice that in those circumstances the judge would only acquit and send back into society someone who had been proved not guilty now the marvel of the gospel is this as Paul announces elsewhere God justifies the ungodly now get that this should take our breath away

the doctrine of justification in the New Testament says that God absolves and sends out of court back into society as not open to any charge against them not not the innocent for there is no one who is innocent not those who've done their best to live up to the light they've had very few have done that if any well who then the ungodly the unrighteous the lost the perishing you say how can that be well now it happens on the basis of what God has done in Jesus Christ our Lord and it all generally comes under the title of this great doctrine of justification let me simplify it for our use this morning what it means is this God in Christ has done two things oh there are more than two things but two things that I want to refer to in relation to this aspect of it properly speaking there

are two sides to this justifying work of God the first we generally speak of as forgiveness or pardon you see as we come before God we come to use an Old Testament metaphor we come clothed in the garb of our unrighteousness or unrighteousness is and all our unrighteousness is no all are what we think to be righteous act they are as filthy rags what we think is good what we think is noble what we think is right and God should accept it from the vantage point of the throne of God is shot through with sin and unworthy so that actually as we come into the presence of God as sinners there is nothing in us that that is really righteous God in his mercy has opened a fountain to cleanse us from all our sins and as we enter into the experience of being justified freely by the grace of God the

first thing that takes place whether we are aware of it is or not is this God takes all the filthy garments away from us the best biblical term is the one of forgiveness he washes us clean you know anything of that my friend have your eyes suddenly become open to the fact that there is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stay oh I hope there is no one here who's got so used to that that you don't inwardly dance and are not inwardly moved by it there is a fountain filled with blood that cleanses the souls of men from sin this is forgiveness the language is pictorial and metaphorical and many of our contemporaries don't like it but it represents a truth which is thus biblically conceived and biblically

announced and we must hold on to it have you been have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power I remember one night as a young Christian being tempted to rebel and to go the way of all flesh again I remember walking down the streets of a town Haverford West in South Wales and hearing the Salvation Army strike up a hymn this is what it was have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power are you washed in the blood of the Lamb are your garments spotless are they white as snow are you washed and it turned me around like that and the voice of God came after me and I could not move for I knew that the Lord had forgiven my sins and I could not become entangled again in what caused the cross of Christ for my redemption but that's only the part justification involves this that Paul actually

pinpoints here that is in a sense the negative aspect of it the taking away of the sins that we are guilty of the forgiveness but the major part is the positive perhaps we should not say we should not speak of the

one that's major and certainly the other is not minor but this is the positive that the Apostle speaks of in our text a righteousness from God has been declared has been announced and it is imparted to men when God absolves us we are now looked upon not just as unrobed of our sins disrobed of our unrighteousness cleansed of our guilt no no no but positively clothed upon God with the righteousness of God himself and you see this is what makes a Christian acceptable before God forgiveness is the negative side of this positive the positive is this brother and sister however young

you are in the faith God sees you this morning clothed in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ you look at those garments you're wearing men or women just look at yourselves and see the stuff you're wearing this morning now just think of them as symbolic of something far greater far bigger far more precious you believer are clothed in the sight of God in the righteousness of God communicated through Christ imparted by the Spirit God puts that to your account and even though you may be previously spoken of in scripture as ungodly unrighteous unholy now in the beloved one in Christ in his righteousness you are accepted one of the verses that brought great a verse of a hymn that brought great comfort to me when I was a young Christian and still does near so very near to God nearer I

cannot be for in the person of his son I am as near as he now that's the scripture that's the doctrine of justification in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus cleanse of our sins clothed in Christ we have access to the throne now in prayer in fellowship even to the table of our Lord and at last to the marriage supper of the Lamb it's all ours for God sees us clothed in the impeccable righteousness of his son the Old Testament pointed forward to it and some of the saints of the Old Testament got it they knew about it I like Isaiah chapter 61 for example where Isaiah speaks of he puts it like this certain people will be called oaks of righteousness what a beautiful picture of a man oaks of righteousness the planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor brother that's what you were

meant to be in your office in your work in your home an oak of righteousness the planting of the Lord for the splendor of his glory to exhibit his righteousness given in Christ expressed in your life later on Isaiah says or puts it in the words in the on the lips of someone he has clothed me with the garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness and Jeremiah speaks of the Lord our righteousness who is your righteousness this morning if you found yourself at the door of heaven this morning if God called you away from this life very early today before we've come to the noon hour and you found yourself at the door of heaven what reason would you have to expect access or entrance I tell you your own righteousness wouldn't take you in your own church going wouldn't take you

in the fact that you're baptized or have come to the communion table in and of itself would not take you in but I tell you something that would open the pearly gates clothed in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus if you can say the Lord is my righteousness this is the basis of Christian assurance that could be no Christian assurance apart from this this is the concept represented then by the apostle Paul here when he speaks of a righteousness from God a righteousness that comes originally from God is mediated by the Son of God and accounted to us made over to us Paul is very daring in the way he refers to this especially in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 21 do you remember how he puts it there God made him that is Jesus Christ God made him who had no sin to be made sin for us so that

in him we might become notice the righteousness of God he was made sin for us who knew no sin and we who knew no righteousness are being made righteous accounted righteous in the righteous Son of God are you justified whose righteousness have you on today your own filthy rags that's not my term it's Isaiah's your own filthy rags are the garments of God's impeccable righteousness now it's no wonder then

that this has been the theme of many of our songs we began we sang just before the message this morning count Zinz and Darth's great word Jesus thy blood and righteousness my beauty my glorious dress read it through when you go home and worship the Lord for it this is something good this is good news you see when there was no hope for any man anywhere God has stepped into the breach to

provide a righteousness that is acceptable before him Samuel John Stone late 19th century he writes this hymn here are two stanzas it is the voice of Jesus that I hear his other hands outstretched to draw me near and his the blood that can for sin atone and set me faultless there before the throne Oh great absolver grant my soul may wear the lowliest garb of penitence and prayer that in the furthest courts my glorious dress may be the garment of thy righteousness Wesley sung about the same thing not only in our opening hymn but in another with one stanza which goes like this accepted in the well-beloved and clothed in righteousness divine I see the bar to heaven removed and all thy merits Lord are mine somebody here this morning may be very much afraid to die afraid of death afraid of the

after death afraid of the things that lead on to death my dear friend listen here Oh take this for your comfort this morning accepted in the well-beloved and clothed in righteousness divine I see the bar to heaven removed and all thy merits Lord are mine what more can you ask for we shall be singing in our next hymn in a moment or two mine is the sin but thine the righteousness mine is the guilt but thine the cleansing blood here is my robe here we are again you see here is my robe says Horatius Bonar my refuge and my peace thy blood thy righteousness Oh Lord but now a righteousness from God has been revealed brethren I feel an urgency this morning I would like to come to every pew and ask you by name do you do you know this righteousness men and women are you clothed in this garb I don't

care what you're wearing in your pews physically but I do care whether you wear this or not you will die without this you will perish without this without this you and I are lost whose righteousness are you garbed in before God you have none of your own my friend if scripture is true but here it is but you say how does it become mine I can't expound this now but I can say two things the righteousness from God comes through Jesus Christ to all who believe see that's why we have the bread and the wine points away from the preacher the minister the pastor points away from the elders points away from the church I have nothing we were we were not there in a sense we were but actually we were not historically we were not it had nothing to do with us Christ died and if you go on in this passage

it says that God set him forth to be a propitiation for our sins God did God did something and the whole basis of this great good tidings is this that God has given us his son to be our Savior to do all that was necessary to bring pardon and then peace and to bring righteousness and with it assurance God has done it all and it comes through Jesus Christ you can't bypass Jesus Christ I sometimes meet people who want to bypass Jesus Christ friend you can't do it he is the way he is the truth he is the life no man comes to the father but by him you have to come to him for pardon you have to come to him for peace you have to come to him only through him you get righteousness and then there's this other little word I can only mention this freely freely isn't that wonderful I know some of your

people are very rich and if I was asked to preach this morning that you know you got to put your hand in your pockets and check of ten thousand dollars twenty thousand dollars some of you could do that you pay for it some of us couldn't it may be equally difficult for some of us to realize that you this is priceless and especially if you are rich and you're accustomed to paying what you get paying your way and you may tend to get a little proud and you're not prepared to receive a gift and friend there's no other way to receive this freely freely the Queen is here there is a little story about the Queen around Buckingham Palace many

of the workers of Buckingham Palace were members with us in Westminster Chapel where I was before we came here there is a little story about the Queen when

she was a little toddler playing with some girls from the neighboring school who had been allowed into the Buckingham Palace gardens and in process of in process of talking and playing and whatnot this little visiting girl saw some flowers that really took her fancy and she turned to now our Queen and asked her do you think I can buy some of these flowers for my mummy she's not very well today and the Queen is a tiny little girl about eight or nine if I remember correctly stood on her two hind feet and said oh no she said no one buys from my daddy but I'm sure he'll give you some and she went and she ran to see her daddy and her daddy said yes you'll give her as many as she likes and somebody went out to cut the flowers you see he doesn't sell but he gives my God does not sell what money

have you got to buy from him where's your currency your righteousnesses my dear friends how many of us keep the Lord's Day holy let alone seven days in the week how many of us keep the Lord's Day where are we going from the table today freely he gives that word is used also of our Lord Jesus in John 15 25 it's the same Greek word where Jesus said they hated me without a cause now it takes three English words to translate the one Greek word without a cause and it's the same word that appears here in Romans freely it's translated let me put it like this he justifies us freely out of his grace without any cause in us no cause in us everything in us requires him to condemn us and judge us there is no cause in us for our justification before God none at all not even our penitence not even our

faith there is nothing we can do to earn it without a cause in us he loved us he gave his son who gave his life and atonement and the spirit comes to us to give us the Christ and with the Christ his pardon and life and right you understand the Apostles excitement I can but now when there is no one righteous anywhere but now a righteousness from God has been revealed and men receive it freely is it yours I don't need to assure you that clothed in that righteousness you're accepted at his table you may not be a Presbyterian you may not be a Baptist I don't know what you are doesn't matter but you've come to God through Christ and you've received freely of his bounty no man can say you may come come and in the words of our Lord remember me the peace of God which passeth all understanding

keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his son Jesus Christ our Lord and the blessing of God Almighty the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you and upon you remain with you always amen

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