SERMON FOR MAILING OUT – SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 2019 – LENT 5

Romans 3:23-26           For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

In Christ Jesus, who achieved the justification of all mankind through His holy life and innocent suffering and death and whose resurrection announced the justification of all mankind, Fellow Redeemed:

There are key passages in Scripture which present the Gospel in capsule form. Perhaps the most widely known passage is John 3:16: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” That passage reveals God’s rescue operation for lost and condemned mankind.

There are also key words in Scripture—words whose meaning proclaim the Gospel. One such word forms the nucleus of our text. It is the word “justify.” The word is a forensic term, that is, an expression that comes to us from the courts. It means to declare righteous, to declare innocent, to pardon, to acquit, to forgive. The scriptural use brings to mind a courtroom scene with God as Judge. The sinner is brought before the bar of divine justice and cannot but plead guilty. His dishonor, Satan, is at hand to accuse and condemn and demand the death sentence eternally. Then comes His Honor, Christ, as attorney for the defense. He pleads the case of the condemned sinner, offering His merit and His own death as atonement for the sins of the guilty. The Judge of all flesh then pronounces the guilty sinner righteous far Christ’s sake. That is the judicial action behind this key word, justification.

This morning we want to spend our time in studying this one word, as we consider the scriptural teaching of—

THE JUSTIFICATION OF ALL MANKIND:

I. It was made necessary by the guilt of all.

If you start reading the letter of Paul to the Romans, you will find that he quite elaborately establishes first the guilt of the Gentile world and then the guilt of the Jews. He demonstrates that the Gentiles rejected the Lord God as Creator and worshipped instead the creatures that God had created. As just punishment the Lord permitted them to become the victims of their own lusts. Just read the last part of chapter one for the Holy Spirit’s evaluation of ancient civilizations, including what is known among us as the glory of ancient Greece and Rome. Then Paul turns to the Jews who had the advantages of the Law and prophets. Despite all these advantages the Jews also stand condemned before the judgment seat of God because they failed to live according to the will of God. Thus the Spirit passed judgment upon all mankind through the pen of Paul. Paul expressed that judgment in the words of the psalmist: “They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” You and I are included in this verdict of condemnation, for “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” 1 John 1:3. The guilt of all—without a single exception—made necessary the justification of all mankind.

How could God, who is just and holy, justify man, who is sinful and unjust? Of this judicial verdict we find that—

II. It was made possible through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

“Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Redemption is another of the big words of Scripture. To redeem means to buy back, to pay the ransom. Prisoners of war and slaves were at times redeemed for a price. When kidnapping was more in vogue, the victims were freed by the paying of a ransom. All mankind had become slaves of sin and guilt, victims of death, and prisoners of Satan. A ransom had to be paid to set mankind free. God sent His Son to pay that ransom. What was the price? St. Peter told his readers in these words, “Ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation—or way of life—received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” 1 Peter 1:18-19. Many people imagine that money can buy anything and everything. It can’t! It can’t purchase the forgiveness of a single sin—not all the money in the world. The purchase price was blood, not the blood of beasts, not the blood of sinful man, but the blood of the holy, innocent Son of God.

Paul says the same thing when he tells his readers that God set forth His Son “to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.” Propitiation is a difficult word. Some of the newer translations use the word “expiation,” which isn’t much less difficult. The word actually means the mercyseat or cover on the Ark of the Covenant and recalled to the minds of the Jews the solemn service on the great bay of Atonement. The ark contained the two tables of the law which condemned the people of Israel before God whose presence was symbolized by the cloud of smoke between the cherubim above the mercyseat. On that solemn day the high priest entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood of one goat on the cover of the ark or the mercyseat and drove the other sin—laden goat into the wilderness. What the high priest did annually as a symbol of what was to come, Jesus did once and for all time when He shed His blood on Calvary’s cross. Then were we justified through His redemption! That made possible the justification of all mankind.

III. Which was announced mightily in the resurrection.

“God . . . set forth (His Son) to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” God declared the righteousness of His Son for the remission of sins. when did God the Father and Judge of all mankind make this declaration to all the world? That He did Easter morning. The rolled away stone, the empty tomb, the announcement of the angel: “He is risen!” was God’s public declaration that the sins of all mankind were forgiven in Christ.

Let us be sure that we understand, for we are speaking of the very heart and core of the Gospel. The details of the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus are familiar to many people, but few understand the reason for His suffering and death. St. Paul puts it very simply and briefly when he writes in this same letter, “He was delivered for our offenses.” He had no sin. Despite all of their efforts to trick Him with their questions and despite the fact that they kept Him under surveillance for years, His enemies could not find any fault in Him. His judges, first Herod and then Pilate, pronounced Him innocent. Yet He was condemned to death. Hhy? Because He was the Sin-Bearer. The burden of all the sin and guilt of all mankind was loaded upon His shoulders. He carried that burden to the cross, but before He died, He cried out, “It is finished!” He died in the assurance that He had paid the penalty for every single sin of all mankind. Has He mistaken? The resurrection is the answer. His atoning sacrifice was sufficient and was acceptable and accepted by the Judge of all flesh. The holy justice of God left Him no course but to proclaim the righteousness of His Son and with that the righteousness or justification of all mankind. That the Father did by raising His Son. If Christ had failed, the Father could not have raised Him, and we would live and die as slaves of sin and victims of death. Thanks be to God that our Lord Jesus “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.” Romans 4:25.

What is now to be done with this verdict of justification for all mankind?

IV. It is to be proclaimed by the preaching of the Gospel.

The Father spoke mightily on Eastern morn. He spoke through the earthquake that removed the stone and revealed the empty tomb and He spoke through His holy messenger. This proclamation is to continue until the end of time. Before our Lord ascended into heaven, He commissioned His disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. He commanded them, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” Mark 16:15. He told them that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Luke 24:47. On the day of His ascension He said again to His disciples, “Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Acts 1:8.

On every side and at every hand we see sin and its effects. The newspapers, the magazines, the radio, and the television keep on bringing us a steady, ceaseless flow of stories reporting the crimes of man against his fellowman. The courts of the land have their files filled with the records of one man’s sin against another man. The consciences of each man, unless it has become completely dulled by his own sin, keeps on accusing him. Sin brings with it guilt, as surely as rain brings moisture. Some sinners are driven to insanity by their own guilt. Some are driven to suicide. Some go to psychiatrists who try to talk them out of their guilt. Some imagine that they can remove their guilt by offering God their pitiable efforts at good works. Some deceive themselves into believing that they have no guilt. Others imagine that because God is love, He will overlook their guilt. BUT THE GUILT REMAINS! Then comes death: violent death on the field of battle, violent death on the highways, violent death at the hands of violent members of society, slow and lingering death by starvation and disease, sudden death from a heart attack, death from the infirmities of old age. So it is this day. So it was yesterday. So it will be tomorrow. So it was in times past since the beginning of the world, and so it shall continue until the end of the world.

There is only one cure for this sin-sick, guilt-stricken, and dying world—the message that God the Judge of all has pronounced guilty mankind righteous for the sake of His Son, Jesus Christ. That’s the whole message in capsule form. That message is the power of God unto salvation, for -

V. It is appropriated to the individual by grace through faith in Christ Jesus.

“Being justified freely by his grace.” Here on earth all things have their price tag, either marked in cash or demanded in some way or form. There is only one exception. Forgiveness is free. The removal of all guilt is free. Victory over death and life eternal are free. There are no strings attached to this offer. There is no fine print that makes conoitions. Forgiveness, pardon, justification, righteousness, victory over death, everlasting life—all of it from whichever angle you look at it—is a gift of God. It can’t be purchased by man. It can’t be merited by man. It can only be rejected by man. And that is why the one sin that damns is unbelief, for when a man rejects the grace of God in Christ, he remains laden with sin and guilt, worthy of eternal torment and condemned to it.

How does the individual get the benefit of that which was done for him almost two thousand years ago? The Gospel is proclaimed not as a lifeless word, but as it is indeed—the power of God unto salvation. While the message sounds forth, the Spirit of God is active upon the hearts of hearers, working faith which accepts, appropriates, makes its own the priceless gift of divine forgiveness. Through faith you and I can say: “Though I am a sinner and sin daily, I live under the grace of God who has forgiven all my sins for Jesus’ sake. Though I live this life of mine as a dying member of a dying race, yet I possess by faith the seed of eternal life. Though Satan accuse me, he can’t cause me to tremble, for the Lord Jesus is my Defense and Defender.”

May the Spirit of God warm our hearts with the assurance of salvation that is our through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus! Amen.

—Pastor Paul F. Nolting

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