

From Rags to Riches

BROADCAST October 7

SCRIPTURE—*Romans 3:23-28*

TEXT—“*Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*”—*Romans 3:24*.

John Newton was a slave trader. When as a lad he left his native England to go to sea, his mother told him that she would pray every day that he would become a Christian. Many years passed, and her prayer was not granted. Instead John Newton went from bad to worse. Eventually he reached the very bottom of the moral, social, and spiritual ladder. It was in such a condition that the Spirit of God convicted him of his sin. Through repentance and faith he turned to Jesus as his Saviour. And out of this experience John Newton wrote one of the greatest hymns of the Christian faith.

*Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.*

This thought is contained in our topic “From Rags to Riches.” For it expresses God’s method whereby He transforms a lost sinner into a redeemed saint. The Bible calls it “grace.” John Newton, knowing the change that it wrought in his life, called it “amazing grace.”

Now what do we mean by “grace”? The history of the Greek word rendered “grace” tells its own story. Originally it meant to make a gift; then to forgive a debt; then to forgive a wrong; then for God to forgive

sin. Turn these words around and you get the picture: forgive sin, forgive a wrong, forgive a debt, make a gift. So basically the “grace” of God is the “gift” of God. It is God acting for your salvation and mine apart from any merit on our part. It is unmerited favor bestowed upon us by a merciful God.

It is that of which Paul speaks when he says, “. . . *being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rom. 3:24).

The epistle to the Romans is the greatest exposition of the Christian Gospel on record. Against the dark background of man’s sin Paul portrays the glorious grace and righteousness of God. As we consider these three facets of the gospel of Christ, let us note, first, the ruin of sin; second, the redemption by grace; third, the righteousness of God.

First, consider the ruin of sin. “*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*”

These simple words sum up the havoc which sin has wrought in the souls of men. As you look at yourself in the mirror you may regard yourself as the exception to the rule. Like the Pharisee you may be tempted to thank God that you are not as other men are (Luke 18:11). But you should remember that while man looks on the

outward appearance, God looks on the heart (I Sam. 16:7). And as He does so He sees that you have fallen far short of His glory.

You can best understand what sin has done to your soul by noting some of the words used in the Bible to describe sin. One such word is "crookedness" or "twisted." Thus sin has twisted your soul, your attitudes, your outlook on life. That which was made in the image of God sin has twisted out of shape, so that the divine image has been marred. God intends that your soul shall be according to the straight rule of His righteousness. But sin has twisted it into the crooked will of Satan.

Another such word for sin is "violence." Along with it note such words as "lawlessness," "iniquity," "wickedness," and "offense." Apply these to your soul. Contrast violence with the peace of God; lawlessness with the will of God; iniquity, wickedness, and offense with the holiness of God; and you get some concept of how you appear in God's sight.

But the word most commonly used for sin is the one in our text. It means to miss the mark or target. Imagine yourself shooting at a target. It matters not whether you miss it by an inch or a mile. If you miss it, you miss it. The target or aim for your life is the will of God. Regardless of how little or how much you miss it, you are a sinner in God's sight.

This suggests two fatal attitudes toward sin. One such attitude is to make light of sin altogether. You are not concerned with the fact that you are a sinner. You take life as it comes, indulging the appetites and weakness of your body with little or no thought of the consequences. Or else, in the words of Paul, "*knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of*

death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Rom. 1:32). Of such an attitude the Bible has one word. ". . . fools make a mock at sin" (Prov. 14:9).

Another such attitude is to weigh or grade sins. To you some sins are heavy or light, big or small. But God regards all sin as a transgression of His will. For instance, two of the Ten Commandments forbid murder and lying. You call some men murderers and others liars. God calls both groups sinners. Sin is crossing the will of God. What one does afterward is another matter. But the basic sin is a transgression of God's will. The epistle of James says that if you break one of the Ten Commandments you are guilty of all (2:10).

Indeed, the basic sin is not of the flesh but of the spirit. The Bible calls it unbelief or a refusal to align your life with that of God through a personal faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. John 3:18 says, ". . . he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

So because of your sinful nature which expresses itself in sinful conduct and in a rebellious refusal to trust in Jesus, you have missed the mark, the target of God's will, and thus have come short of the glory of God.

Second, note the redemption by grace. "*Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*"

Most of you hearing me now do not fall into either of the above groups. You neither mock at sin nor seek to classify sins. Instead you recognize sin for what it is and for what it has done to your life. In such a realization you are endeavoring to do something about it. Recognizing that

your sin has separated between you and God (Isa. 59:2), you are seeking to remove it in order that you may know the forgiveness of God.

So long as he can do so Satan causes you to ignore your sin. But once the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin, Satan endeavors to misguide you as to the remedy. His most successful deceit is to lead you to rely upon your own power to overcome the sin principle in your life. It was this trap into which he led the Jews. Of them Paul says, "*For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God*" (Rom. 10:2-3). The Jews were ever so religious, but religion as such was not enough.

All men are religious in one way or another. Indeed the religions of the world may very well be classified under two categories: that which man does for God, and that which God does for man. It is in this latter sense that Christianity differs from all other religions.

So much religious activity today, even in the name of Christianity, is a "going about to establish their own righteousness." One emphasis is on the evil that one does not do. By this standard a clothing store dummy would qualify as a good Christian. The other emphasis is on the good that one does. By comparison, in this light the Hindu would put most Christians to shame.

But both emphases miss the mark. Each places its emphasis on the plant and ignores the root. As a farm boy I learned that you do not rid a field of weeds merely by chopping down the plants. They must be dug up by the roots. Likewise, we do not solve the

sin problem by chopping down the weeds or by tying rose blossoms on them. Sin must be uprooted. And this is not the work of man but of God.

It is of this that Paul speaks when he refers to "*the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*" We understand this only as we read the first part of the verse. "*Being justified freely by his grace . . .*" "Justified" means an act of God whereby He declares one righteous, a righteousness which is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 10:4). "Freely" means "free for nothing." "Grace" means a gift of God.

So long as Satan can lead you to trust in your own efforts for salvation you will continue to abide in spiritual death. But once you turn from self-reliance to the Saviour, you will immediately pass from death into eternal life. "*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord*" (Rom. 6:23).

Third, consider the righteousness of God. ". . . *that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.*"

Perhaps you are saying, "Well, preacher, that sounds very well. But I have learned that anything worthwhile costs something. How can you expect me to believe that I can get something for nothing?"

Indeed, you are right. Salvation does cost something. It cost God the life of His only begotten Son. But it may be yours for the receiving of it. It is because you cannot merit or earn eternal life that God has acted on your behalf.

The theme of Romans is "*the righteousness of God*" (1:17). In simple terms the righteousness of God is God acting to declare you righteous as though you had never sinned. But how can God do this? Certainly not by ignoring your sin. "*The wages of sin is*

death," and someone must pay this penalty for your sins. Since you cannot do so, and live, it was necessary that God do it for you.

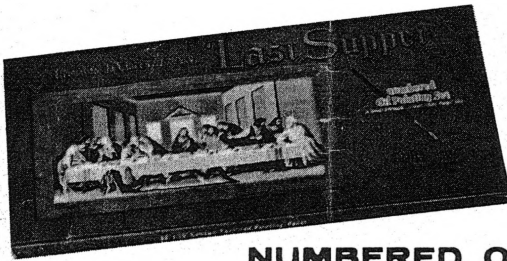
This is what Paul means when he says that God might be "just" and the "justifier." God must be just. The wages of sin must be paid. But God is also merciful. How, then, could God be true to His nature as both *just* and *merciful*? He is just in that He does not ignore your sin. But He is merciful in that on the cross in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, He paid the full penalty for your sin. It is thus, and only thus, that He can offer salvation to you as a free gift. This is the meaning of the grace of God.

Isaiah tells you that in God's sight your self-righteousness is as filthy

raags (64:6). But Paul tells you that in Christ "*we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace*" (Eph. 1:7). So by the grace of God through faith in His Son you can this moment be transformed "from rags to riches," not because you deserve it, but because God in Christ bestows it.

"It is yours for the asking." Never was this statement more true or more meaningful than when heard from the lips of God. And He has said it, you know. Here are His words through the inspired apostle. "*For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*" (Rom. 10:12-13).

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