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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday evening 17 May 1931

ROMANS 4 v 6, 7, and 8

"Even as David also describeth the blessedness of
the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness
without works, saying, Blessed are they
whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins
are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord
will not impute sin"

Psalm 32

This, of course, is a quotation made out of the 32 Psalm, where David describes himself as having had the experience of divine pardon, and of the covering of his iniquities, and sins, and he says in that Psalm that in such a person's spirit there is no guile. Divine forgiveness, divine justification, a sense of redeeming love, takes the guile out of a man's spirit. If anything makes a man free from sin, as to the love of it, as to the entertainment of it, it is God's goodness, and especially His goodness in salvation, in forgiveness, but it is a great thing, beyond expression great, to believe that there can be deliverance for such as we from sin, and guilt - its presence, its power, and its consequences - but the gospel reveals this great thing, and God alone can accomplish it in the experience of any poor sinner; and it implies what we noticed this morning, that the man has something to forgive, something to be covered. If you have no shame to cover, no soul to save, no sin to be forgiven, no guilt to be purged away, no distance of a moral kind between you and God, the source of blessedness, then this will be of no interest to you. But if you are filled with shame, filled with sin, felt distance between you and God is a painful thing to you, because you see that in Him is all blessedness. In His favour is life, in His presence is fullness of joy, and at His right-hand there are pleasures for evermore. It will be not a little thing for you to be brought to believe that these dreadful disabilities that attach to you, and of which you cannot rid yourself, can be removed. "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works". David does not speak about

righteousness being imputed. He only says, "Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven, and whose transgressions are covered". But what can cover them, and how can they be forgiven? Nothing can cover iniquities, and transgressions, and sins from God's eyes but that which is infinitely meritorious and perfect. So we must notice just a little concerning this righteousness which is imputed without works to an ungodly person which, being imputed to him, covers from God's sight, all his sin, for it is God that looks upon the sinner and pronounces upon him. His judgement that He pronounces is just. And some of you may say, in your heart's experience, you can understand how God can justly pronounce the sentence of condemnation upon you; that you have well thoroughly merited that sentence because of your sin, and transgression of His law, and because you have so come short of His glory, and because you have in you so much enmity against Him, and all goodness. All the people who are born again in a measure feel that, and for a time it is all that they can feel. They meditate terror. They see the justice, and holiness of God, and they tremble, and are troubled in heart, and mind, because God is holy, and just, and omniscient, and inflexible, and that He is faithful to His threatenings. These things trouble them because they are sinners. It is, to repeat myself, it is one of the greatest blessings that can ever come to any sinner to be thoroughly convinced of his state before God by nature. It is a mercy when God makes clear work with people, when He shows them in some bearable measure, and it is almost unbearable at times, what they are as depraved creatures; when He ploughs up the fallow ground of their heart, and turns it over, and discovers to themselves - not to their fellow creatures; it is heart work, secret work - discovers to the sinner himself what is in his nature, what he is, and then he can understand a little of what the hymnwriter means

Stripped of all his fancied meetness
To approach the dread I Am

Have you ever felt stripped, naked, and covered with filth in a spiritual sense as before Jehovah? Such people are led to seek, to cry, to beg, to watch, to run, to look, to pant after a refuge, a Saviour, if so be that they may obtain a well-grounded hope of salvation. Works - they prove by the patient teaching of the Holy

Spirit in them - works can never work them remission. The remission of sins is an impossibility - it is in the Scriptures declared, and it becomes an experienced impossibility - without reference to blood shedding. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission". And without the remission of sins, then justice will fix sins on the sinner who has committed them, reckon them his, impute them to him justly. When you think of God's terror in His holiness, and your deserts as a sinner, remember that the hell into which He will turn the wicked and all the nations that forget God, will burn justly with the fire of His holiness, witnessing to the truth Paul declared, "For our God is a consuming fire". God is just, righteous, holy, perfectly so, and He never will, He never can, do an unjust act. No man in hell will be able to rise up against the justice of God, and it is a very solemn thing to feel divine justice in the law against you, and to feel that your sins are so possessed by you, that only Divine mercy prevents you from covering them or being finally hardened by them. What a mercy if by grace you seek to have a covering of them by God. If you cover your sins you deceive yourself, but not God. You may cover them, as you think, you may cover them with your own excuses, you may cover them with many things not of the Spirit, but if you do so you will not prosper. But he who is shown himself, is led, in God's time, to see that there is a covering, and that covering is the very work of Christ, the infinite obedience of the incarnate Son of God. By coming to this earth, this holy Son of God, brought in "everlasting righteousness" (Daniel 9 v 24), and through His death wholly covers an unrighteous sinner with it. Yea, a company that can never be numbered, of unrighteous sinners, and that everlastingly shall testify to "The blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness" By this act of imputation God magnifies the riches of His sovereign grace. He is "righteous who taketh vengeance" (Romans 3 v 5), and He has declared for the comfort of the humbled believer that He was righteous in avenging the sins of all who believe in Him, in their "Daysman" as Job by faith longingly called Christ (Job 9 v 33). Their sins were justly imputed to Him, that His righteousness might be justly imputed to them, through the gift of faith. The death of Christ was a righteous act of Deity; the Trinity united in it and thereby justified all for whom Christ died. Thus Paul argues: that God "might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus", (Romans 3 v 26) On that foundation truth he then proceeds to

our text saying that the sinner who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted - or imputed to him - for righteousness. The God-Man's, the Daysman's, righteousness justly becomes his by God's free grace. The mystery of Christ's Person, God-Man, underlies, and is in, every jot and tittle of all His work upon earth. All the work Christ accomplished on this earth has in it the merit of Deity. It is infinite, though in His humiliation He was in a locality, a real Man, He walked about, but He never ceased to be what He was, without beginning, God's Son, and this great mystery is necessary to be believed if we are really seriously to believe that His work will really make us just before God. He was in all respects equal to the law. He magnified it and made it honourable by suffering its penalty. You look; if the whole human race, if every individual from Adam down to the last person of the human race had maintained innocence, and obeyed the law of God perfectly, that would not have honoured God's law to the same extent in which the obedience of the One Man Jesus Christ honoured it when He personally obeyed, for He is God. And so we read in the Scriptures that God purchased the church with His Own blood, that He brought in an everlasting righteousness, by being, as the Messiah, cut off, and not for Himself; that He restored to the law of God what He never took from it; that He restored to God the glory that men robbed Him of by being sinners, and He did it for men - His "brethren", the elect chosen in Him before the foundation of the world with whom, as Solomon was inspired to write, were His delights (Proverbs 8 v 31). Otherwise there would be no possibility of its imputation to man. An angel could not do it. The whole company of elect angels could never accomplish this. But this one obedience, full, complete and infinite in virtue, and merit, this everlasting righteousness, this is sufficient. It constitutes righteous every person to whom Jehovah imputes it, and the Son came here manifestly as "the Lord our Righteousness", that it might be imputed to His people - all who believe in Him. The purpose for which the Father sent His Son was that He should be the propitiation for our sins. He manifests His grace in this channel in which His justice should shine, and His mercy should flow to the most abject, and miserable sinner on earth, even through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth, reckoneth, the righteousness of His Son, results from the obedience that Christ rendered personally to

the Will of God, the law of which was in His heart as He came into this world. God can never render righteousness to you that you have done. Your goodness, however much you may think you have of it, and however much it may profit your fellow men - for it will; righteousness among men is a good thing; the Lord give us more and more of it - will not bear the scrutiny of the all holy eye of God. It is spotted.

Our best is dyed and stained with sin
Our all is nothing worth

in respect of merit before a holy God. But this righteousness that God imputes, that He reckons to the account of ungodly sinners that are brought to believe in Jesus Christ, this righteousness of His Own Son, has no flaw in it. Not one jot or tittle of the law, said the Lord Jesus, shall be unfulfilled. He came, not to destroy, but to fulfil that holy law, and to fulfil it for His people, for sinners.

For sinners, Lord, Thou cam'st to bleed
(says one) And I'm a sinner vile indeed

Sinners can say, and none but they,
How precious is the Saviour

and how precious is the robe which He lovingly bestows to cover His naked people, as Kent wrote

We seek no other blood or name,
To cleanse our guilt and hide our shame
But that wrought out by Christ, the Son,
Which God imputes, and faith puts on.

The righteousness that God imputes to men is not their own personal righteousness - they have none - but it is the personal righteousness of the Man Christ Jesus that is laid up for them, and it is everlasting righteousness, righteousness that can never be abolished. And the imputation of this everlasting righteousness is an act of God that can never, will never, be reversed. When did God impute this righteousness to people? Well, in the chapter we read we

may see that it is plain that God did it from eternity, and that He did it also when Christ died. "God was in Christ reconciling the world" - that is the world of the elect - "unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them". "For He hath made Him" - that is His Son - "to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him". Now the personal experience of this blessedness of non-imputation of sin, and positive imputation of the Saviour's righteousness, is what every child of God will be brought to pant after, to seek, and wrestle, and long for. It is an experience brought into the soul by the Holy Spirit, and, as I said this morning, it covers everything. It does its work when God causes you to know - what before was the truth but, lacking the knowledge of it, you had not the comfort of it - that the effects of Christ's life and death upon this earth are in their virtue and merit reckoned to you. Then you will rest, then you will worship, then you will be free, then you will bless the Lord, then you will have a contrite heart, then you will have sweet liberty. Then, if you look for your sins, you wont find them. No, it covers all. "The blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works." This has no respect, as to merit, to your repentance, though you will repent. It has no respect to merit even to your faith, though by faith you will receive this righteousness. It has respect only to the work of the Lord Jesus, and it is freely, and abundantly, and without price, granted by God to the worst of sinners who are led to seek it, feeling their need. It shall be "unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." And this blessedness of the man who has it, has this righteousness, lies in this, that sin cannot affect this righteousness; that time cannot affect it; that the devil cannot steal it; that it is secured everlastingly to the person by the imputation of it to the sinner by God. It will never be abolished. The man who has it will never lack righteousness. He will not cease to be a sinner in this life - O that is a painful thing to learn. When you obtained some sense of interest in the finished work of the Lord Jesus for yourself, and Christ was precious to you, you felt His presence, and His love, and rejoiced in Him, as the righteous are called upon to do in the Psalm I have named, and out of which this text is quoted, the 32 Psalm - "Rejoice in the Lord ye righteous, and shout for joy all ye that are upright in heart", that is a forgiven sinner - perhaps

you felt - I know the little measure I have had of it made me feel this - that you would rather die than ever sin or transgress in the least against God. The motive of gratitude, the sweet comfort and rest of your soul, made you feel so indebted to Him, that you longed to be holy, and the one, the only thing at that time you will fear, will be to sin. O, the earnest pleas you will put up - Lord, do not let me sin against Thee again. Do not let me transgress against Thee. Let me not in any wise grieve Thee. While you bless Him for His goodness, feeling His goodness in your heart, this will be in your heart at the same time. But my friends, the Apostle, who wrote this epistle, this wonderful epistle - the Lord give us grace to be frequently consulting it by the Holy Spirit's help - this Apostle, he had a rich experience of justification. He had a rich experience of the confidence of faith, and of the love of Christ, and He had a confidence he would not appear naked, but clothed upon with his house which was from heaven. And yet you read in his 7 chapter how he struggled with sin. What a conflict it was, but it did not affect this righteousness. That is one point in this blessedness, that it is sin-proof, time-proof; it can never wear out. If you, for a short time, sensibly feel the Spirit working within you, filling you with His grace, and with right, and gracious desires, and filling you with faith, and His various fruits, and you feel that life of grace within, it is very comfortable, very sweet, but that soon recedes, and no man can retain the Spirit. No man of himself; the work ebbs, and flows, according to the sovereignty of God, and not without any reference to the way in which we walk towards Him. But this righteousness does not ebb and flow. Acceptation with God in the person who is justified, this does not change. Nothing can diminish it. Now that doctrine is like a bulwark to a storm-beaten traveller. I like much what good John Bunyan says about this righteousness. In his own experience in "Grace Abounding" he said, "Suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, Thy righteousness is in heaven; methought withal, I saw with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand: there I say, was my righteousness; so that wherever I was, and whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, 'he wants My righteousness', for that was just before Him." Now when you get, by faith, a realisation of this, and feel the testimony of the Spirit that the Lord Jesus, the Lamb as it had been slain, with all the merit of His obedience, and all the virtue of His precious blood, is in heaven, and there with His

own blood for you, there to be your Advocate, you will be a blessed man. You will feel you are a blessed man. You would not change places with any individual of the human race. You will say, My treasure is above, my salvation is there, my righteousness is there, my home is there, my King is there, my Almighty Friend is there, my Elder Brother is there, my High Priest is there, and you will say, sometimes

His track I see, and I'll pursue
The narrow way till Him I view

Now this is all by faith, that great grace, that emptying grace, that weakening grace, that principle of life and holiness in the soul by the Holy Spirit standing in the power of God and receiving the testimony of God; all this is by faith. We walk by faith, faith, not by sight. "The life that I now live in the flesh" says Paul in the Galatians "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me".

Now some of you may very seriously have this point before you that needs clearing. You may say, I can go so far with the doctrines, they suit my needs, and I feel that if I could but warrantably say, For me He died, for me He obeyed, for me He lives, then I should be a blessed person. Well, you will find many a companion in the Scriptures, and you will find many an exhortation, and direction in the Scriptures. One direction is - "Seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you, ask and it shall be given you", "Pray without ceasing", "Men ought always to pray and not to faint". And remember this, it is God that imputes it, God imputes it. It is He that gives it, He that accounts it the sinner's, He that bestows it freely. "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus". Now if any of you are exercised on this particular point, the Lord help you to press your case. Here is the righteousness; Jesus Christ has holiness, and righteousness enough to sanctify, and justify every longing sinner. Put in your claim, pray to have the title made clear, pray for the Spirit's witness with your spirit that the Lord Jesus is your Redeemer. Pray that He will come and bless your soul so as that you, with the Apostle, and with the people of God, may be confident of this very thing. There is such a thing as a gracious confidence. There is such a thing as a vain

confidence. But if God imputes it to you, if He speaks it into your heart, if He gives you the substance of this blessedness in your experience, then that joy, that blessedness, that peace, that liberty, no man will ever take away from you, as to the source of it, as to the permanence of the source of it, though you may lose the enjoyment many a time.

"Without works". And this gives a man rest. You will boast no more of the merits of your own doings, neither will you feel that you are called upon to render a tale of legal obedience, with the curse over your head if you fail. When Christ died He endured the curse, He was made a curse, He was made sin - "He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin" - for this purpose - "that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him". And I would say this for your encouragement, and would encourage myself at the same time, that God cannot be just unless He does impute this righteousness to those for whom Christ suffered, obeyed, and died, for there was real virtue, real satisfaction, a true honouring of the law of God, a magnifying of it by the personal obedience and death of the Lord Jesus. It cannot be lost.

So rich a cost can ne'er be lost
Though faith be tried by fire

But we need the Holy Spirit to fill us with this faith, and to bring it to the bright, full assurance of it, so that there may be a laying hold of this Saviour, of this righteousness, this eternal life there is in Him.

But though this righteousness is imputed without reference to any meritorious work on the part of the sinner, there are works that accompany it, and follow it. All your works, as to merit, you will renounce, but you will not renounce works, for "Faith without works is dead". Therefore, let that sinner beware that thinks because he has the doctrine of substitution in his judgement, then it matters not how he lives, for that man who speaks so betrays the solemn fact that he is deceived, that he has never known the power of divine grace. "Faith without works is dead". The same faith, whereby a sinner who is brought to feel himself a lost sinner, and helpless, and lays hold of the Lord Jesus, as He is presented to him in the gospel,

lays hold of Him as his righteousness, and his Saviour, and his eternal life, and his refuge, that same faith with which he lays hold of Christ, and His righteousness, has an efficacy to purify the heart. We read, respecting the Gentiles, that God made no difference between the Gentiles and the Jews, granting them also faith, and purifying their hearts by faith. Eternal matters are very solemn, and to be right for eternity is the greatest matter that can ever concern us. And if you feel you have not a sherd of your own, and if the Lord reveals to you this blessed Lord Jesus, and His righteousness, and His obedience, I know that the effect of that in your heart will be what I have said; it will animate with a desire to live unto all pleasing, and while you are feeling the power of it, you will say, Lord do not let me live in sin. Do show me what I have to do. And the most unreserved submission to the Lord, and the intensest desire to walk in all the ways of His commandments will be in your heart when you enjoy the experience of this blessedness. You may often be a wretched man, though you are blessed Often, because you cannot live as you would, you may find yourselves wretched beyond all words, may spend hours in secret before God with this wretchedness, going over your life, seeking to humble yourself before God. Ah, alas for us, we are constantly changing, and disposed to change in a way of backsliding from the Lord continually, but the Lord knows how to bring His people back, and how to teach them to mourn without despairing. And what keeps them from despairing is the doctrine of the text, that doctrine made known to them in their hearts. It is a sweet thing to have it; it is a kind of gracious strengthening to the mind, a bulwark to the mind, that enables you to go, to go to the Lord, not with the terror of a slave, but with the shame of a child that has provoked God. You know the chapter I was reading this morning, how heart-breaking an appeal the Lord makes to His children in the 2 Jeremiah. "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the LORD, and the first-fruits of His increase" "What iniquity have your fathers found in Me....." "Have I been a wilderness to Israel?" These reproofs belong to those who - though wretched, and miserable, and full of shame as they are reproved, and though they feel sick with their own ways - are interested in the blessedness of the text, for God only so deals with His children. Then He says -

"Only acknowledge thine iniquity". Thou hast procured these things to thyself, hast thou not? Now come and acknowledge it. And what is the ground of acknowledging, and the purpose of acknowledging? You know, who are taught by the Spirit, the ground of acknowledging sin is God's mercy in Christ, and the purpose of acknowledging sin is that God may forgive it. While we hold fast to our integrity, while we refuse to return, while we justify ourselves, while we cover our consciences as it were with a covering not of the Spirit, then the Lord will contend with us. O, but His mercy is kind, appeals to the heart, overcomes the heart, and you come, not, as I say with a slavish dread, but with humble, filial fear, with shame, and wretchedness, and trembling it may be, but you come, and the Lord condescends graciously to receive such a person, to tell him again of His love. "I am married unto you", He says; I will forgive your iniquity, I will remember your sin no more. And all of it has this for a foundation, the work of Christ, the righteousness that shall never be abolished. Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Now when God covers them it will give you heavenly peace, it will give you contrition of heart, and you will never more open your mouth when He is pacified toward you for all that you have done. You will never forgive yourself, you will never justify yourself. Pardon of sin does not make sin less in the eye of the pardoned sinner. Yea, I would say, and this is true, the more apprehension you have of the way whereby God can justly forgive, and freely pardon, a sinner, even through the wounds, and agony, and blood of the Lord Jesus, it gives that sinner a capacity to hate sin as nothing else can. The spring, dear friends, of all godly living is Jesus Christ and His dying love. The blood of Christ is able to purge the conscience from dead works to serve the living God; to serve Him, not for life, but to serve Him out of gratitude for His goodness. And how long will these sins be forgiven and covered? Well, when God forgives sins, He forgives them everlastingly. Yes, His forgiveness will never be taken back. He will never remember your sins more against you if He has forgiven them. You may say, but I feel that my guilt returns. I sometimes remember the sins of my youth. Well, you remembering them and God remembering them are two different things. He says, I will remember them no more for ever. But then, does not the Lord deal with His people for their sins after they are forgiven? Do they know nothing about condemnation after they are justified? Yes, every operation of the

law on the conscience, every conviction, and reproof that you get, will make you know that God is holy, that He marks your sins, that He regards your walk. That is a terrible heresy that says that God does not deal with His people for their sins. He smites them, He reproofs them, He chastens them, and what for? To do them good, and because He loves them. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten" The devil, a legal mind, and our unbelief, may sometimes make us fear that the Lord is angry with our persons, and we may forget that we were forgiven, and purged from our old sins, but the Lord does not forget it. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance". My salvation shall never be abolished. Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. Let me just make an observation again that I made this morning. God will, must, impute to you, and to me, either sin, or righteousness. We all have sinned and we all deserve that sin should be reckoned to us, imputed to us, and fixed to us, with all its eternal consequences, death, banishment from God. No one merits the imputation of righteousness. We have no personal righteousness, but this which God imputes He does of His Own free grace, in His Own sovereignty, to those who have nothing of their own, but who are taught to look, by precious faith, to the obedience, and blood of Christ, and this becomes the centre of their life, the source of their hope. Christ and Him crucified becomes their glory, and well may the hymnwriter say that we should treasure up, whole and undiminished, the sacred words of the Lord Jesus - "It is finished". His work, my friends, can never lose its merit, never lose its virtue, and all that we need, all that you, poor, convicted, repenting sinners need, is for God to give you to know the Lord Jesus as your Redeemer. And when He gives you to know that you will be this blessed man in your own experience. The Lord Jesus said to His disciples - "Let not your heart be troubled". Perhaps some of you say, Well, mine is troubled, beyond all expression troubled, and that, because I am a sinner; because I feel to deserve divine wrath. Then what did the Lord Jesus say? - "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me." And if He says that in your heart He will create the faith, make Himself known, and you will see who He is, what reason you have to trust Him, to believe in Him, and to rely the whole weight of your immortal interest on Him, and to feel that the work of His hands shall prosper. You can never trust in the Lord and be put to confusion. The more implicit the trust, the

more honour the Lord condescends to get out of a poor sinner. It is honouring to Him to trust Him, and it is for His glory to forgive, and justify sinners, ungodly sinners, for Christ's sake. May the Lord make these things real to us. May we have the rich experience of them in our hearts. And this blessedness, beginning in this life in a little degree of enjoyment, will go through eternity. It will begin, in its fullness, when this life ends. Sin then will not only be covered, but it will be eradicated. The sinner will no longer be a sinner, but a holy, and just saint eternally. I say, the blessedness is in heaven in the fullness of it. It begins here. The Lord grant us much of it here, give us grace to seek more, and more of the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and of our interest in His obedience, and death.

AMEN.