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Sermon Preached at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
by Mr J.K. Popham on Sunday Evening
5th July 1936

Text 2 Corinthians 5 verse 21

For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

How the Eternal Father, loving and delighting in His Eternal Son, holding eternal communion with Him and the Holy Spirit, how these three equal Persons could consent with, the imputation to the Son of the sins of sinners of mankind, to the punishment upon Him, with the curse of a broken law, is one of the mysteries of God never to be understood by fallen human reason. Never to be absolutely embraced by our poor little faith, but a truth that has in it, death to sin, destruction of the works of the devil, and the redemption of the Church and her ultimate glory with Christ. It is a taste of heaven, to know a little of this great mystery.

To know the imputation of our sins to the Son of God incarnate, to know a little of the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, what it cost to open that fountain, what it means to His holiness and His majesty. What it meant to Him, "That, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." (2 Corinthians 8 verse 9). What that poverty of His was, we little know if we know anything. It was partly this, "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation," (Philippians 2 verses 6 & 7). partly this, "He is despised and rejected of men;" (Isaiah 53 verse 3). and persecuted by the devil. Partly and chiefly this, "Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts:" (Zechariah 13 verse 7). His Father called on the sword of infinite justice to awake. It had as it were been sleeping with regard to the election of grace, through all the ages from the fall of Adam until the crucifixion of Christ, and now that sword instead of being bathed in your and my souls, was made fat in the blood of Christ. This, as I conceive is just a little inkling of what this is, "He hath made Him to be sin," not a sinner, but to be sin. No guile was found in His mouth, "Who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners". (Hebrews 7 verse 26). No not a sinner, but sin. If it could be worse, it is worse to be made sin, just in the concrete, abstract, in every sense of the dreadful word sin. Christ was made that, made guilt, made liable to punishment, yea punishment became inevitable to Him. He was not rebellious.

A wonderful passage, I have felt lately, is that in Isaiah, "The Lord God hath opened Mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back." (Isaiah 50 verse 5). Dugged the word, as it were, into Mine ear, and I was not rebellious, think of it. "I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting." (verse 6). He was made all this, that you who were purchased by His blood, might have grace and heaven. "Made sin for us", now this is a wonderful word, and you are brought into it by the Holy Ghost, if among the us. "What then ? are we better than they ? No, in no wise:" (Romans 3 verse 9). Did we ever, could we ever deserve more than others ? Does not the grace of God make each possessor of it, the vilest of all vile people in their own estimation, who viler than myself ? How so ? I say, who viler than myself ? The corruption, the wickedness, the atheism, the blasphemies, the denial of God, the dishonouring of God, Oh you cannot multiply too much, you cannot exaggerate when you come to speak of your sins except, and this is a great exception which you need faith to believe, except you make it more than the blood of Christ. I have to insist upon that among you, because of my own experience.

Legality will tell you, if you are concerned about salvation, that you cannot have an interest in it because of your enemies, of sin and the depth of your guilt, but one touch on your conscience of the blood of Christ, will tell you that it was ignorant legality that made you thus conclude. He, the Father hath made His Son to be sin, Oh what an object for justice did Jesus thus become, what a suitable Person was He in this condition for the desertion of His Father. How suitable was He for that awful word, "Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts: smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered:" (Zechariah 13 verse 7). We read the word, but the smiting, if any one who is led into it, cannot sufficiently see why, and asks what has the shepherd done ? Actually nothing to deserve the smiting, but by imputation of His peoples sins, everything that calls for such smiting.

The holiness of the Lord Jesus could not be seen, as it were by His Father, when He looked on Him, covered so to speak, covered with the sin imputed to Him. May the Holy Spirit lead us into this truth. What did His Father see in Him ? He saw sin, and as it were nothing but sin, and therefore He could do nothing but punish Him. A solemn consideration is this, that His Father could do nothing but punish Him, and yet He loved Him, loved Him all the while, gave Him a commandment, and the Son obeyed the commandment.

And therefore His Father loved Him, opened His ear and told Him what to say, and what to do, yet all the while sin was on Him. He did no sin but He was made sin. Now if the Holy Spirit should take of this divine act of the Father, to His only begotten Son, and show it to you who believe in Him, you will be amazed. If I get a sight of it with you, I should also be amazed. Did the darling Son of God, deign to become a man ?

Was it for (crimes) sins that I had done
He groaned upon the tree ? (Gadsby's 763 verse 3)

Was it that you might go to heaven ? that He said to His disciples, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things," (Luke 24 verse 26). What an ought, if you were falsely accused, it could not be said in a righteous way, ought He not to suffer, that would be a false accusation, but it was no false accusation the law of God makes against His Son. Men did, they were not as wise as the devil, for he did not do that. But the Father never lodged an unjust accusation against His Son. There is this blessed word, "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God through Him.". May we fall before this scripture.

The mystery of it, the mercy of it, as opened up and revealed, will bring peace to our souls and liberty to our consciences, liberty from guilt. Now there is a degeneracy or a consequence of this to which, briefly as enabled, I shall draw your attention for "He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; and this was the end of it, the fruit of it, the glory of it, "that we might be made the righteousness of God through (in) Him." There is one judge only of what is righteousness, absolutely eternally, and that is God. We think we know something about righteousness, but we are too ignorant to really understand it without the teaching of the Holy Spirit. God alone can say what is righteousness, and here is imputation, that we whose sins are removed by God's own hand, we who have merited hell, we who hated God, who Pharaoh like said, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice" (Exodus 5 verse 2). Or, what profit is there that we should pray unto Him, "for we, who said we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways." (Job 21 verse 14), that we vile creatures, Oh if I could put my foot on this vile self in the pulpit now, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

Think of it righteousness to full perfection, righteousness in which God Himself can find no flaw or fault. There is not a saint on earth who could say, or who would say in a right mind, that he had ever done one single act that was absolutely pure. Sin says Joseph Hart, is mixed with all we do and think and say,

Every thing we do we sin in. (Gadsby's 800 verse 2)

And yet the person, who truly says those things, is righteous by imputation. There is a justification for every saint which is not this. There is a work of sanctification in every saint that is not this righteousness, you never can divorce justification and sanctification, but they are not the same thing absolutely. There is a connection between them, most beautiful and blessed. But imputed righteousness gives absolute perfection to the person who is pronounced holy. God's absolute justice accepts that person and views him righteous. as there is no fault to be found in him.

Oh sinner you will need faith to believe this of yourself, I need it to believe it of myself. What says the poor sinner ? what such a wretch so corrupt, without any fault in character before God ? It is so, through this righteousness, and so when we come to stand before God, it will be, that,

Righteousness to full perfection
Must be brought, lacking nought,
Fearless of rejection. (Gadby's 800 verse 7)

Now sinner you may tremble, you may be saying, Oh but that is a long way beyond me, but what are you after ? Come now, what are you after ? when you say, as perhaps sometimes you can honestly say, "As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God." (Psalm 42 verse 1). What is it you are after ? Oh say you, I am after salvation. What is salvation ? If justification is not in it, it is not salvation. If there is no justification in salvation, the word is not right or true, Is that true for you ? Can you believe it ? can you receive it ? That you a poor wretch, hating yourself, can be made this blessed righteousness. ? That we may be made, "The righteousness of God in Him ?

It must be perfect, being in Him, there are two ways of being made righteous. The first is, when Christ said "It is finished." (John 19 verse 30). He left nothing to be done, in the way of saving or justifying His people. He made an end of their sin, as prophesied, "I will remove the iniquity of the land in one day". (Zechariah 3 verse 9). Every saint, every child of God therefore, then purchased with blood, is without sin, clean, and righteous, and that was by Christ's death. And when He went to heaven He went there for His people. The second way is this, by that beauteous, perfect robe, nay, Jesus Christ Himself is brought to the sinner, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

Now may I set you after Him a little more clearly, brought to the sinner, you may say, how can I get it ? The Lord does not tell you to get it, He says, "I bring near My righteousness, it shall not be far off, and My salvation shall not tarry:". (Isaiah 46 verse 3). And when it is brought near to you it will clear you, humble you, crumble you, melt you, and raise you up. You will not know how to be thankful enough, how to humble yourself enough, and how to praise Him enough. "It shall not tarry," Oh no you say, I have long waited for this, when God in His zeal performs this mercy, For, "the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this." (Isaiah 9 verse 7). And when He brings it to your heart, then you will say, though He tarried for a while, He has fulfilled His word in me. "That we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

Now when this is brought to the soul, there is nothing left of distance, the distance of guilt between God and the soul. how shall I know it, you say ? A good man in Scotland went to his minister, the man was much exercised, and he said to the minister, 'How shall I know the voice of the Lord ?' This was the ministers wise reply, "Never man spake like this man." (John 7 verse 46). If you say how shall I know that I am justified, I say, never could any other righteousness answer that question, but this righteousness, and when you get it you will not say, how shall I know it. You will say, I have got it, for it is mine. "Surely, shall one say, in the Lord have I righteousness and strength: (Isaiah 45 verse 24). That shows that it becomes a personal experience. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8 verse 1). "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."(Romans 5 verse 1).

The righteousness of God works, "which effectually worketh in you that believe." (1 Thessalonians 2 verse 13). you will wish to work with all your might, but not to make yourself righteous, but because you are righteous, because you are justified, because God is your God, because Christ is your Redeemer, and your Righteousness. You will say, Oh I would live unto God, I would live for God, I would live on God, I would ever be His, and ever be near Him. You cannot give credence to what I say until you get it. and when you have got it, perhaps you will say, in days to come, if you remember me saying this, the minister did not say the half of it. "The one half of the greatness of thy wisdom was not told me:" (2 Chronicles 9 verse 6). It is too blessed for language, too wonderful for praise, I have hardly room to receive it, yet it is in me. I am made the righteousness of God.

You say, what about the blood of Christ ? That brings it, Paul speaks to the Romans about being justified by His blood, for this reason.

That His precious death expressed by His blood shedding, did away with all sin, made an end of it, and if there is no sin, where there is righteousness, and if there is righteousness there is eternal blessedness. My friends the gospel is a full gospel, I am not ashamed of it, and I believe some of you can say the same. I am not ashamed of justification by an imputed righteousness. John Wesley said it was imputed nonsense, woe to the man who dies with that in his heart. It is imputed perfection, and you must bring it in your experience, you must have it, so to say, "In the Lord have I righteousness and strength." (Isaiah 45 verse 24). Oh says one, my heart is like a stone, do you think it would remain a stone if that righteousness came ? It would be like wax in a flame. But Oh I am distant, could a righteous God hold a righteous person at a distance ? What means communion but nearness in justification, what means communion, but God's smile on a justified person. Oh says another, it is too high for me, it can come down to where you are. How does God lift up a sinner from the dust, and take him from the dunghill ? by this righteousness. This is how God blesses His people.

Ah you would say, I wish you would talk about evidences, you will get all the evidences you want, when you get this righteousness, every evidence of being right, and that is the point. Every evidence of being a child of God, and that is the point. Every evidence of being loved of God, of being died for by Christ, every evidence of being a true Christian, you will find working in your soul, when this blessed robe is put upon you, when you are justified. It contains everything, the Apostle Paul said, when he knew that he was going to Rome to see the Christians there, "And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." (Romans 15 verse 29). Was this righteousness outside of that ? No, no. So believing friends, those of you who are concerned about being right with God. this is the thing, seek after it, and never rest until you get it.

Now what has the Church here to do this evening ? It has to celebrate the wondrous mystery of God reconciling His people to Himself. May the Lord help us, may He powerfully help us. Now I cannot go on much longer, not many minutes. For when I left home, it seemed almost impossible for me to come, but I do think I had a little faith, and said to the Lord, I go in faith. I have had just sufficient strength, and none to spare, to speak to you on this mystery. May the Holy Ghost bring it to you. Do not think of me about anything but this one thing, I have tried to preach unto you. If it is made over to you, it will take you to heaven, where you want to be, and where I want to be.

And I expect to be there one day, I hope to be, although I feel I am going to live a little longer, according to God's kindness in intimating somewhat to me about the future. May the Lord bless you my brethren, I long to see, those who are not yet, truly justified. I long to hear you praise Him, to whom you now are groaning. I long to see you happy in the Lord, and then obedient to Him in the ordinances of His house.

Amen.