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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Raven on Easter Sunday 9th April 1950

Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Romans 8 v. 33, 34.

The Apostle sets before us in this chapter the ground of his rejoicing, of his rejoicing over sin, indwelling sin and all the power of the enemy, and he opens the chapter on this note, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus", and he found that good and solid ground to stand upon. The ground upon which he stood was nothing other than the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, yea even "God which always causeth us to triumph in Christ", and in the midst of all the soul agony that he experienced by reason of the sin that dwelt and worked within him, he was enabled to "rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh". He realised that though he found so much evil within him as he said, "In me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing", although he had continual matter for mourning and for self-loathing, yet he was enabled to believe this, to find comfort and sure standing in this "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus". Then, in the words preceding our text he says, "what shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" He had just spoken of the fore-knowledge of God and His predestinating grace, His purpose of grace toward His people, and we have that wonderful golden chain as it has been called, "Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" He saw salvation to be the work of God alone. Salvation had its rise in the bosom of God, it was the product of His eternal love and of His mighty power. So the Apostle goes on to say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Oh, happy is the man that hath the God of Jacob for his Refuge, happy is the man who has the Christ of God for his Friend. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" We noticed in reading our lesson (Romans 5&6) how that the Apostle in setting forth the wonders of divine love and what that love had done, said, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly", and again, "God commendeth

his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us", while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. The business of the Lord Jesus Christ, as He dwelt here below, was with sinners, the gospel He had to preach, the things that His Father commanded Him to preach, were for sinners. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor", and He said in His message to John the Baptist, "the poor have the gospel preached to them". The gospel which the Lord Jesus preached was only suited to sinners, to poor people; there is nothing in it for the Pharisees or the Scribes, or for the lawyers who were so full of pride and self-conceit, who had so much religion that was only of the flesh, and thought themselves to be healthy and in no need of a Saviour. There is nothing in the gospel for them. "Woe unto you Pharisees, woe unto you lawyers". Woe, Woe it was to them; "Woe unto you that laugh now." O how unspeakably solemn it is to come under the woe pronounced by the Christ of God! But the gospel that He preached was for the healing of broken hearts and wounded spirits, it was for the comfort of those who were cast down, for the relief of those who were burdened and the deliverance of those who were captives and in the prison house, and so in that wonderful fifth chapter we see the love of God set forth in this, "God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". Are you a sinner? "Though all are sinners in God's sight, there are but few so in their own" said Mr. Hart. Where are the people who are sinners in their own sight? sinners by deep heart-felt conviction? sinners who can do nothing towards their own salvation, and who can produce nothing, no not a thought that is good? Guilty, polluted, helpless? Oh the gospel is for such. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". And that was the outpouring of the love of God, as we read, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee". Oh, the Father draws poor sinners to Himself through His dear Son the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me". "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? God's chosen ones, people whom God hath set apart for himself, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" and however men may quibble and fight against it, the doctrine of election and of predestination shines like a sunbeam throughout the whole of the Scriptures, from Genesis through to the end of Revelation you find that doctrine clearly set forth, and you cannot deny it without making a lie of the Word of GOD. Well, here the Apostle says, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?"

"It is God that justifieth". Now, those who are called "God's elect", His chosen people whom he foreknew and whom He had predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son, and whom He had justified in and through Christ Jesus, and whom He ultimately will glorify, these people are, every one of them, sinners worthy of everlasting condemnation. One says, "My sins deserve eternal death", but then God had found a way whereby His justice can maintain all her rights, whereby the perfections of the Godhead can receive the fullest honour, and yet sinners be justified. Oh, it is a wonderful thing to contemplate that God can be just and yet be the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. Of course, if you think of sin as only a trifling thing, then justification will be in your view a trifling thing, but if you are led to view sin, and feel sin as that hideous monster, that hateful thing that it really is, to be justified will be a great matter to you. "How should man be just with God"? How can a sinner stand in the presence of infinite Holiness, in the presence of Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before the high God?" Such questions will be burning questions in your heart and conscience and until the Spirit of God reveals Himself the way of salvation, you will not, for the life of you, be able to see how the thing can be done. You may be familiar with the letter of the gospel you may be familiar with such phrases as this, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" and the chiefest of them, but the words alone will convey nothing to your heart. It is when the Holy Spirit conveys the words with power and unction to your heart that you feel and rejoice in the truth of them. Well, for God to justify a sinner is a great matter and how can He do it? how does He do it? Why, he sent "His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit". That is the way God has taken, He spared not his own Son. God so loved, "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life". He "spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all". We read of Christ, that "being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain". Oh. what does it all mean? There was something more in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus than His being taken by wicked hands and crucified, something more than that, "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him" "The Lord hath laid on him", said Isaiah, "the iniquity of us all". The Lord Jesus Christ stood as the responsible Surety of His people.

He loved the church and gave Himself for it, He bare her sin in His own body on the tree, He stood before His Father with the guilt of innumerable transgressors. the guilt of multitudes of people laid to His charge, and that guilt was punished in Him. "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him". It means just this, that the God against whom we have sinned, came and took the punishment, yes,

"The Offended dies to set th'offender free".

The God who made all things, the eternal Word who built the earth and skies, the God who made all things came into the world to save sinners, and to save them by bearing the curse and the condemnation due to their sins. One may well say,

"On such love, my soul, still ponder,
Love so great, so rich, so free;
Say, whilst lost in holy wonder,
Why, O Lord, such love to me?"

Oh, if this is brought home to you, it will break and melt your heart, it will be to you the fulfilment of that Scripture, "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you an heart of flesh". Nothing can melt the heart but the love and blood of Jesus. Well, "it is God that justifieth". A holy God takes His stand, so to speak, upon the Person, the Righteousness, the atoning Death and Resurrection of His dear incarnate Son, and on that ground He pronounces the sinner just. He is "just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus". He is just and the justifier of the ungodly. O that precious declaration, "To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly". I am ungodly, I have been ungodly all my life, I was born in sin and shapen in iniquity, and one can hardly bear the thought of sins that one has committed in the course of one's so sin-polluted life. Ungodly. People may say, well, you never seem to do much that is wrong. Ah, but God knows what my heart has been privy to, God knows what a cess-pool of iniquity my heart is by nature, and that word has been to me a great word, "To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly his faith is counted for righteousness." Oh, if God were not the justifier of him that is ungodly, the justifier of poor, ungodly sinners, I should have no hope. My works could not procure justification for me; not my fears, nor my prayers, nor my preaching, nor anything else that I do that may appear to others to be right and godly, none of these things can procure justification for me. The only ground of my justification is the atoning death and the obedience of the Lord Jesus.

"Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed
With joy shall I lift up my head."

The Lord grant that the substance of all that may be revealed and wrought in our hearts. Well, it is God that justifieth and there is no higher court. There is no appeal from this judgment. It is God that justifieth and if God pronounces me just who can say that I am unjust? If God pronounces me just who can lay anything to my charge? "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth". Look, for instance, at the penitent thief on the cross. I often think of him when I think of those words, "to him that worketh not but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly". My mind, when I repeated the words just now, went at once to the thief on the cross. What had he done? Why, he had lived a life of crime and violence, and richly deserved the death he died, and he was brought to confess it when he believed on Him that justifieth the ungodly. An amazing act of faith it was that wrought in the dying thief. "Lord", he said. And you think of the scene. There was Jesus of Nazareth surrounded by a mocking, howling mob, surrounded by people who hated Him and thirsted for His blood, who rejoiced to see Him brought so low. Yet that thief on the cross looked upon that bleeding, dying Form, and he saw something that drew this prayer from his heart, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom". It was an amazing act of faith to see the glory of the Son of God shining in the mangled form, that bleeding, dying Man! The man was justified - a remarkable instance of an ungodly man being justified by faith and having peace with God through Jesus Christ. "Who is he that condemneth? who is he that condemneth?" Do you ever condemn yourself? Do you ever have to look at your sinful self and look back upon your sinful life and condemn yourself? The publican did, for hear what he said, "God be merciful to me a sinner", the sinner. He condemned himself, he bare witness against himself that he was a sinner, but "Who is he that condemneth" Then again, conscience condemns and the devil is called the accuser of the brethren, he condemns. Martin Luther tells how one day Satan presented to him a long list of his transgressions and Luther stood and looked at it and, "Satan, it is all true and more besides, but write underneath, 'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from all sin'." "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died". I remember some years ago having this feeling, that though my sins caused me much pain and shame, and my sinful heart was a continual source of trouble to me, yet these things did not terrify me because "It is Christ that died", and there seemed so much in that, "It is Christ that died". Had any other stood in Christ's place and attempted what Christ did, it would not have done us an atom of good, but since it is Christ that died, all the blessings that flow from His death, the peace

that comes by His death, the forgiveness of sins, the free justification, all comes to sinners through His atoning death. "It is Christ that died". What a victory! What a sacrifice! What a death! The poet said, "The rocks could feel thy powerful death". Oh, there is something inexpressible about the death of Christ, as there is something inexpressible and inexplicable about the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. I was thinking as I sat in the vestry just now, of what I heard a minister preaching somewhere about fifty years ago. And as he preached I had this thought, 'Oh, I love to hear great things of Christ!' It was wonderful to my heart to hear great things spoken of Christ. Would you say to your minister, "Minister, lift up Jesus Christ, lift Him up, preach great things concerning Him". Well, the Apostle here says, "it is Christ that died". When he died He offered a mighty offering, an offering of infinite virtue and sufficiency, so that His death cancelled all the sin that was imputed to Him, He made an end of sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and the Father looks with infinite satisfaction and approval and delight upon the Person and Offering of His dear Son. That was a little sweet to me (I may have told you of it) while I was ill for a short while earlier this year. It came to me in a dream which was presented to me like this, that the Lord Jesus Christ was in His Father's eyes an Object of ineffable delight and perfect satisfaction, and that He was in the eyes of infinite justice fully satisfying and perfect. When I awoke the savour of it still remained with me and it gave a turn to my thoughts for a little while afterwards, and I did feel that in some measure and degree my thoughts were harmonious with the thoughts of the Father concerning His Son, and I hope I know what it is to look upon Christ and think upon Christ with some sense of His preciousness and some realisation of the infinite satisfaction the Father has in Him, and the satisfaction that Justice has in Him, that the Father is satisfied, that infinite Justice is satisfied. Oh, how good it is for a poor sinner to be satisfied with the same precious Object! "It is Christ that died". "He offered Himself without spot to God", but then, the Apostle does not stay there, He says, "yea rather". He does not stop at the cross. Some people are very fond of setting up a crucifix, and putting it about their homes and churches, of images representing the crucifixion, and in some cases the burial of the Lord Jesus, or His agony in the Garden, but the Apostle leads us beyond all that. It is not a dead Christ that He preached but a living Christ who said. "I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore". The Apostle says, "yea rather, that is risen again". There is a note of triumph in those words of the Apostle in the 15th chapter of the I Corinthians where he says, "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them

that slept". He had been saying what the consequences would have been had Christ not risen from the dead. "Then is our preaching vain, .. your faith is also vain, yea and we are found false witnesses of God", and "Ye are yet in your sins" if Christ be not risen, and we are of all men most miserable. The men of this world have at least some sort of satisfaction out of, this world and the things of it, but to the people of God who, for His sake have renounced the world and have for His sake gone forth to Him, if Christ be not risen, then for nothing have they followed Him, but the Apostle triumphantly says, "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept." "Yea, rather, that is risen again", in token that the debt is paid, that the redemption is accomplished, that the Father is well-pleased, that the God of peace hath "brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant". "Yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God". Here is another precious thing for believers to keep in mind. It is well to have this in view, that Christ is not only risen from the dead but was raised by the right Hand of the Father and set with Him upon His throne. Him hath God highly exalted, and given him a name which is above every name", "who is even at the right hand of God", in all the sufficiency and validity of His atoning sacrifice, His everlasting righteousness, His finished work, as Toplady beautifully phrases it,

"His love intense, His merit fresh,
As though but newly slain".

"Who is even at the right hand of God", and in the epistle to the Hebrews, the Apostle Paul tells us of the Lord Jesus Christ that because he continueth ever, He hath an unchangeable Priesthood, wherefore He is able to save all them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. "Who is even at the right hand of God," "who also maketh intercession for us", that is to say, presents the merits of His atoning death and the glory and the preciousness of His obedience continually before His Father. The Father looks upon His Son with infinite satisfaction and delight, and the Apostle said, "hath made us," that is, made His people, "accepted in the Beloved," "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption". "Who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us"; Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day and for ever, is at the right hand of God, Christ Jesus the propitiation, Christ Jesus who hath obtained eternal redemption for us, Christ Jesus

who is the righteousness of His people, who is their Prophet, their Sacrifice, their Wisdom, is eternally and unchangeably at the right hand of the Father; "who also maketh intercession for us". Oh, His thoughts are with His poor people, His thoughts are with those for whom He died, and He maketh intercession. Oh, I like that word in Isaiah 53, where he said, "He made intercession for the transgressors". It might have been said that he made intercession for the elect and it would have been true, it might have been said that He made intercession for broken hearted sinners and for the penitent souls - it would have been true, but it says, He made intercession for the transgressors. There he meets His believing people at the lowest point, where they feel their deepest woe, where they realise their utterly undone condition, there He meets them in that Scripture, "He made intercession for the transgressors". The poet says,

"He passed within the veil,
Did on His bosom bear,
Those worthless names, that did prevail
With Him to enter there".

"Who also maketh intercession for us". He ascended into heaven itself, the first fruits, "Christ the first fruits, afterwards they that are His at His coming". And as He is the firstfruits, so ultimately and most surely all His redeemed, every member of His mystical body, will be with Him in glory, according to His own request, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am that they may behold my glory". Oh, do you covet an interest in that? Do you ever wonder if Christ had you in His thoughts when he said, "Father I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am"? Do you covet an interest in Christ? Is it your desire to be enabled to look up to Him and say with Thomas, "My Lord and my God"? If so, the Lord fulfil all your petition for His name's sake. Amen.