

The Cravings of the Conscience Satisfied Through Jesus

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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
— Romans 3:24-25.

Paul had just traversed the valley of Dry Bones. He had stood with us there (v. 23) pointing to men everywhere, men in every age, while he uttered by the Holy Ghost the declaration, “*All have sinned.*” There is sin on all, there is guilt on all; “*all have come short of the glory of God.*” If you and your fellow men have not sinned grossly, so that even the world condemns you, nor so evidently that even your own conscience brings in the verdict of guilt; yet certainly you have not glorified God. You have come behind in the race; you have failed to reach the mark, “the glory of God”; your heart has never loved God with all its strength. You are lost, you are ruined, doomed, condemned already.

But a Savior has come along this valley. Salvation is in Him. What He did and suffered saves; and when He testifies of Himself He brings the salvation near. If in Exodus 34:6-7, there be a sevenfold proclamation of the name of the God of grace, not less is there in this passage a sevenfold unfolding of the grace which our God and Savior brings.

We write at this time especially for those whom God has led down into that valley, persons whom God has awakened, and who are moving about amid gloomy apprehensions of sin, guilt, helplessness, wrath, death, and God’s averted face. We wish to direct you to God’s real feelings toward you, God’s gracious provision for your case, God’s grand means of relief ready for you, as set forth by the Holy Ghost in the above passage of the Word. It was to the Ethiopian eunuch, when reading the Word, that the Holy Ghost drew near; and it was the truth about the Lamb led to the slaughter that the Holy Ghost used in bringing joy to that anxious soul, when “walking through dry places, seeking rest and finding none.” So it is still His way to make use of the Word, and of what the Word tells of the Savior. There is some view of God in Christ exactly fitted to confront and to compose every vexing thought and every alarm in your convinced soul; all which views you must find in the written Word, for you can find them only there. The Word is the glass or mirror in which the heart and mind of God are reflected and made known to us. To the Word you must go; your own thoughts and feelings can afford you no guidance. Be, then, like

Augustine, who, at a time when his soul was as tossed and darkly troubled as yours, seemed to hear a voice saying, "Take up and read! Take up and read!" and who, in so doing, by one of the passages of this Epistle, was led to rest. Or, better still, let us pray that you, dear reader, may be as the poet Cowper, who, in the act of reading the very verses before us, obtained a clear view of the gospel, was filled with joy unspeakable, and spent some days thereafter in nothing but prayer and praise. What say you then?

1. Your eye is on the *sentence* against you. You read, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." You are Belshazzar reading the handwriting on the wall, "Mene, Tekel!" Your days of mercy numbered! Yourself weighed and found wanting!

But the first word here is, "JUSTIFIED," a word that says that there is such a thing as pardon for the sinner; ay, and pardon most thorough and complete! Pardon that leaves the sinner in the position of one made righteous! Justification means more than pardon. For (as your conscience and the Word of God tell you) the law has both precepts which must be kept, and prohibitions, which, if infringed, are rigorously punished; and so *justification* is an act of God the Judge, acquitting the sinner from every charge of having violated the prohibitions of the law, and accepting Him as one who has perfectly fulfilled every precept. What news! God is acting thus to thousands in our world, sinners like you.

Is not this a ray of hope? There is such a thing with God as *justification*.

2. Your eye is on *yourself*. Though you see that God may justify sinners, yet, now when you look at yourself, hope is gone. "I have no claim to this blessing; I deserve nothing. I cannot bring even such amount of feeling, of repentance, of desire, as might be pleasing to God. Alas, for me!"

But the second word here shoots in its ray, "FREELY." This word means, "Without there being anything in you to deserve it; without any cause on your part at all." This is good news. God when He justifies takes the sinner as He finds him, waiting not for good feelings, duties done, love, sorrow, amendment, tears, prayers. He comes forward to originate all holiness in the heart of the person whom He has previously justified; but in justifying He has respect to *nothing in you*. All is done *freely*.

Is this not a ray of hope penetrating your dungeon, through a chink in the prison door?

3. Your eye is *on God*. Startled by the last announcement, you take your eye off the sentence and off yourself, but only that you may fix it on GOD, with whom you have to do in this matter. You say, in your despondency, "Even if I do not need merit, even if my guilt does not repel Him, yet where can there possibly exist any reason for His conferring this justification, so freely given, upon me? I can be of no advantage to Him. What, then, could ever induce Him to think of conferring it on me?"

Listen, my brother, "BY HIS GRACE" is the next clause; and this means, "Out of His own free love." He looks not into you, but into His own bosom, for reasons why He should take you as one

of the sinners who is to be justified. It is grace that dictates His movements. He has love in His own heart unfathomable, and that love sends Him forth to such as you. Fix your eye, therefore, on that word, “by His GRACE,” and take courage. You may be “to the praise of the glory of *His grace*.”

Is not this another bright ray of hope?

4. Your eye is on the *law*. Suddenly you remember, “But He is a holy God and true; He cannot act contrary to His law and its sanctions, and I cannot meet that law’s demands. The obedience must be given, and the penalty for past disobedience paid, before ever God can honorably be at peace with me, or my own conscience feel satisfied and safe. Without this payment of what is due, the specter of obligations never met might haunt me even in the streets of New Jerusalem.”

But stay, read the fourth clause, “THROUGH THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS.” Grace has formed a channel for itself. The God of grace gave us a Mediator, a surety, a substitute. *Jesus* came to redeem, Himself obeying for us, and himself suffering unto death. The law spoke to Him, and He answered; the law exacted its demands on us from Him, and He satisfied them all. Turn hither, and see Jesus presenting to us sinners all which He has accomplished, and bidding us use it all, as if we had in our own persons gone through it all. His *redemption*, His redeeming work, makes it a righteous thing with God to act in grace toward us. God may be said to come forward to you, brother, with the law in one hand, and in the other *with that law fulfilled*.

What say you now? Is not this a brighter ray than before? Surely the prison door is opening?

5. But your eye is on the *Savior*, that you may discover your *warrant to use His redemption*. May I go? Many others go, but what entitles me? Only hear, “WHOM GOD HAS SET FORTH A PROPITIATION.” Jesus is a propitiation in every sense. He is the antitype of the mercy seat, which is called the *propitiatory* in the Greek; and He is antitype of *every propitiatory sacrifice*.

A propitiation means something spoken or given or done or borne, by which the burning displeasure of a superior is calmed down and removed. That was a propitiation which Jacob sent to his brother Esau (Gen. 32:13-20) when he sent a present, and added words of submission and regard and kindness. And you see another instance of propitiation in the conduct of Abigail, at the time when David was breathing out revengeful indignation against Nabal. Abigail put herself to the trouble of going forth personally, in all her engaging beauty; she spoke words of confession and gentleness, falling at the feet of the offended one, and presenting loaves, corn, cakes of figs, provisions sufficient for every man’s need. Now, Christ thus came forth, when our God was most justly offended at our willful, flagrant, persevering violation of His holy law. What awakened soul is there that has not felt something of the awfulness of that anger, when crying in bitterness of spirit, “Rebuke me not in Thy wrath, neither chasten me in Thy hot displeasure” (Ps. 38:1)? In these circumstances, we say, Christ came forth; He confessed our sins without reservation or

palliation, and then laid down before the offended Father the reparation of the wrong done to His law, by His own obedience and suffering unto death. The Father's displeasure passes away, and His countenance shines with unmingled goodwill and delight, when Jesus thus presents Himself before Him as the propitiation for sinners. Even as David's brow relaxed into a smile of deeply complacent satisfaction, when Abigail, in her own person, laid her propitiation at his feet.

Now, notice well, that Christ is here said to be "*held forth*," or proposed and held out to public view. The mercy seat is unveiled; every eye may look. The sacrifice is offered, and every sinner may come and use it. Nay, every eye ought to look, every sinner ought to come, for He is *held out, or set forth* on purpose. He is exhibited to all, like the brazen serpent; and woe to him who refuses to look! This is your warrant; there is no other ever given to any man, and there is need of no other.

Will you not act as you do with the air you breathe? What is your warrant for inhaling it? Simply this, that it is poured round you as it is round all others, and your part is to draw it into your lungs in breathing. If you wait for a special, personal, individualizing warrant to use that air, before you will venture to inhale it, you must die! And your death will be *suicide*. And not less true is this in regard to your applying the *Savior*.

6. Your eye is on the *supposed distance between you and Christ*. You fancy some great difficulty as to your way of using the warrant to go to Him! How am I to come to Him? This wonderful passage answers your case here also.

"BY FAITH IN HIS BLOOD" is the reply. You do not approach Christ by any bodily act, nor get any vision or sight of Him with your eye. But you hear what is declared concerning *His blood*, that is, concerning His having finished His atoning work by dying. You think on that, and you believe it; and in the act of believing it, you and Christ have met. Yes, in the moment of your simply believing what *His blood*, or His death, speaks to the soul, you have touched Him, and He has touched you. You have appropriated Him. You have used Him. On the spot where the soul believes what God says of Christ's blood, God and that soul meet in peace. God ties salvation to your believing, not to your doing, nor your feeling, nor your praying. The Holy Ghost persuades and enables you to believe that that work of the Substitute pleased the Father well. He makes you see the work done by Jesus, and be pleased with this way of reconciliation to God. And so, you trust, and find rest in Him.

Thus it is that "faith" links us to the redemption.

7. Your eye is on *the righteousness of God*. All else may be so far settled, but the tempter and your own suspicious heart conspire to ask, "But how *would my salvation affect God's character* in the eyes of the universe? Would not His glory be obscured by taking such as I am into His presence forever?"

No: all this is done on very purpose "TO DECLARE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS." When you, a

sinner, are justified in the manner already stated, that is, by faith in Jesus, Jesus and you are considered as having become one in the eye of the law; and so it is on the ground of your *possessing that most perfect righteousness* that you are saved. In the very act of thus saving you, God proclaims His love to righteousness. Your ruin, your perdition, your condemnation, would declare God's hatred of sin; but your salvation will declare His love to righteousness.

Oh, marvelous salvation! We return home by a way all strewn with wonders. It is by one stupendous thought piled on another (so to speak) that we scale the heavenly mansions—"justified," "freely," "His grace," "redemption in Christ Jesus," "set forth as propitiation," "faith in His blood," "His righteousness!" O fellow sinner, when the day of the Lord comes, you will see two companies, each setting forth God's righteousness—the one by wearing the bright robe conferred on them by the Lord Jesus, a righteousness brighter than angels'; but the other by being made to endure in their persons the infliction of the threatened curse. Make choice of the provided salvation. If the Holy Ghost carry home to your heart each of those seven words we have dwelt upon in this one passage, not a corner of your heart, not a crevice in your conscience, would be unsatisfied, unfilled. O brother, remember the true saying of Dr. Manton on his deathbed: "It is infinitely terrible to appear before God the judge of all, without the protection of the blood that speaketh better things than the blood of Abel." Alas! In such an hour, your eye would turn sometimes to your *sentence*, sometimes to *yourself*, sometimes to *God*, sometimes to the *law*, sometimes to the *Savior*, sometimes to the gulf between Him and you, sometimes to the unalterable *righteousness* that frowns and will frown forever over you. These would be your "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Peres." Why not this hour read, and rest on, this blessed and better handwriting, every word uttering hope, deliverance, security, salvation?