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Sermon Notes

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The Glowing Heart of the Gospel, part 1: Justification Through Christ

Romans 3:21-26

I. Introduction: William Cowper's Salvation

II. Lloyd-Jones: "The Acropolis of the Bible"

A. The Hot, Glowing Center of the Gospel

B. Three Major Themes

1. Justification: Sinners Declared Righteous

2. Propitiation: The Holy God's Wrath Appeased

3. Demonstration: The Gracious Judge's Righteousness Displayed & His Glory Upheld

III. Justification: Sinners Declared Righteous

A. Definition: What Is Justification?

vs. 20 "... by works of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight..."

vs. 24 "...being justified as a gift by his grace..."

1. Greek root: linked to righteousness

a. "righteous", adjective = δικαιοζ

Romans 3:10 "There is no one righteous, not even one."

b. "righteousness", noun = δικαιοσυνη

Romans 3:21 "But now, the righteousness of God has been manifested..."

c. "to justify", verb = δικαιοω

Romans 3:24 "...being justified freely by his grace..."

2. "Righteousness" = holiness, rightness under judgment, innocence of all charges
3. Usage: a declaration that imparts nothing

Luke 7:28-29 "[After Jesus defended John the Baptist] *And when all the people and the tax-gatherers heard this, they justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John.*"

- a. the tax-gatherers and people did not MAKE GOD righteous
- b. they declared God to be righteous
- c. justification is a declaration of the righteousness of someone under scrutiny
- d. therefore, justification does not impart anything to anyone

B. The Need for Justification: God's Holy Judgment, Righteousness Required for Heaven

C. BUT We All Lack Righteousness

Romans 3:10 "*There is no one righteous, not even one!!*"

Thus understanding how we can be declared righteous by a holy God on Judgment Day is the most important quest of our lives

IV. How Sinners Are Justified: Five Principles

Justification is:

Prepared and Proclaimed, Not Accomplished, by the Law Performed by God Procured by Faith in Christ
 Provided By Grace Purchased By Christ Jesus

A. Prepared and Proclaimed, Not Accomplished, By the Law

1. Law Cannot Justify Anyone

vs. 19-20 "*Now we know that whatever the Law says, it says to those who are under the Law so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous by observing the Law; rather through the Law we become conscious of sin.*"

vs. 28 "*We maintain that a man is justified apart from observing the Law.*"

- a. Law cannot produce righteousness in us

- b. Law cannot clear us of past transgressions
- c. NO RIGHTEOUSNESS COMES FROM THE LAW
- d. “Brothers, what shall we do?” Righteousness required on Judgment Day!!
- e. There is a righteousness available: but it is apart from Law

vs. 21 *“But now a righteousness from God apart from Law has been made known...”*

2. However, Law Testifies to Justification By Faith

vs. 21 *“But now a righteousness from God apart from Law has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.”*

- a. testimony in the past: “The Law and the Prophets testify”
 - i) this is an “eternal gospel”

Justification by faith alone is NOT some NEW INNOVATION by Paul

God determined this wise plan of salvation before the world began

Romans 1:1-2 *“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son...”*

Romans 16:25-26 *“Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings so that all nations might believe and obey him...”*

1 Corinthians 2:7 *“We speak of God’s secret wisdom... that God destined for our glory before time began.”*

Revelation 14:6 *“he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation tribe language and people.”*

- ii) Paul will show how the law & prophets testify

Romans 3:10-18 [OT quotations show universality of sin]

Romans 4 [David and Abraham both clearly justified by faith apart from works]

The Law proclaimed justification by faith alone: sacrificial system, bronze serpent

b. testimony in the present: Universal Need for Justification

PURITANS: "Law-work" need to be done... law gets us lost, gospel gets us saved;
George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Robert Murray McCheyne,

5. Thus: Law prepares the way and proclaims the way... but cannot accomplish justification

B. Performed By God

1. A Massive Inbreaking: God Interferes in History

vs. 21 *"But now a righteousness from God apart from Law has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify."*

a. "But now..." a glorious interference from God... like that in Ephesians

Ephesians 2:1-3 *"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins.... All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature... Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. BUT GOD, because of his great love for us made us alive with Christ..."*

Thank God there's a "BUT NOW" in Romans!!!

b. more than change in flow of Romans... interruption in history

Galatians 4:4 *"But in the fullness of time, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those under the Law."*

All human history centered around God's achievement of salvation in Christ!

2. "A Righteousness From God"

a. justification is PASSIVE

vs.23-24 *all have sinned and lack the glory of God, and ARE JUSTIFIED freely by his grace*

English grammar... passive voice means action is performed to us by someone else

b. God is the one who justifies

Romans 8:33 *"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies! Who is he that condemns?"*

- c. God justifies by giving us “a Righteousness From God”

Romans 1:17 “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed...”

Illus. Asbestos robe... covered on the Day of Judgment

- d. the great exchange... our filthy rags of sin, Christ’s perfect righteousness
- e. THEREFORE we cannot boast, for our justification was done completely outside us

3. Righteousness is NOW MADE MANIFEST

- a. manifest in the events of history... Jesus’ physical death on the Cross
- b. manifest also through the clear preaching of Christ crucified

C. Procured By Faith in Jesus Christ

vs. 22 “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Christ Jesus to all who believe.”

- 1. “Procured” = obtained, received... not purchased by us
 - a. faith is passive... it only ever receives

Matthew 18:3 [Jesus to his disciples]“I tell you the truth, unless you are converted and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Child-like faith... confident trust that all will be provided

- b. direct contrast with works... efforts, deeds done to earn favor
- c. we stand alone, stripped of all personal achievements, devoid of all personal righteousness, trusting in Christ alone

2. Faith is focused on Jesus Christ

vs. 22 “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ...”

- a. faith alone by itself has no saving power
- b. faith is always tied to an object which is being trusted

Muslims have total confidence and trust in Muhammad and the Koran... that faith will not help them on Judgment Day

c. we trust the incarnate Son of God... dead on the cross, risen from the grave

3. Faith also focused on the promise of life in Christ

Romans 10:17 “Faith comes by hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

Faith is connected to the word of the gospel... we don't see Christ, but we hear of Him, believe what we hear, and are saved

John 20:29 “Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed.”

4. Faith is universally effective

vs. 22 “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference...”

a. everyone who believes is immediately justified from all sin

b. faith in Christ is universally effective for justification before God!

A poor beggar in Calcutta, a wealthy banker in Tokyo, a single mother in Chicago, a ten year-old orphan in Mexico City, a professional baseball player in Iowa... THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE!!!

D. Provided By Grace

1. “There is no distinction”

1 Corinthians 14:7 “How will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes...”

One note handled differently than the other... played by a different key on the keyboard, noted by a different mark on the score, moving at a different frequency through the air... one note distinct & different from the other

But Paul says... “There is no distinction...”

a. not universally true... there are many distinctions

i) some cast off all restraint and give themselves over to sin

ii) others lead generally moral lives under the laws of God

b. BUT on this matter of justification, there are NO DISTINCTIONS

c. context here: Jew & Gentile

2. Universal sin

vs. 23 “For all have sinned and lack the glory of God”

a. not a person on the face of the earth who has not sinned

b. “All” here means Jew + Gentile

c. BUT “All” in Romans 3 = every single solitary human

3. Sin defined: rejection of the glory of God

a. “fall short” is standard translation

b. BUT gives wrong picture... as though we’re trying to attain to God’s glory & just never quite seem to measure up

c. DOES ROMANS 3 GIVE US THAT PICTURE OF HUMANITY???

3:10 “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God; all have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

d. Greek word usually translated “lack”

[Prodigal son] Luke 15:14 “After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.”

Just as the prodigal son had absolutely nothing to his name, so we absolutely lack the glory of God... we have exchanged it for idols... earthly things

4. God’s wrath: passionate response to the rejection of His glory

God is very angry about that exchange... He’s not indifferent to the rejection of His glory... it makes Him angry, and His wrath hangs over us

That is the need we have for justification: when judgment day comes, we must be clothed in righteousness... because we have exchanged God's glory, we stand naked before the judge

We must have someone else's righteousness

5. Thus, the stage is set for grace: no one deserves anything but the wrath of God

vs. 23-24 *"All have sinned and lack the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace"*

- a. "freely" means lit. "according to a gift"
- b. direct contrast to works

Romans 4:4 *"Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift but according to debt"*

If justification were by our good deeds, God would OWE IT TO US!! Like wages!

- c. but justification is a free gift... our attempts to pay would pollute the gift

Isaiah 55:1 *"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy, and eat! Come buy wine and milk, without money and without cost."*

Illus. Spurgeon

I tell you, Sir, if you bring in any of your deservings, you shall never have it. God gives away his justification freely; if you bring anything to pay for it, he will throw it in your face, and will not give his justification to you. He gives it away freely. Old Rowland Hill once went preaching at a fair; he noticed the merchants selling their wares by auction; so Rowland said, "I am going to hold an auction too, to sell wine and milk, without money and without price. My friends over there," said he "find a great difficulty to get you up to their price, my difficulty is to bring you down to mine." So it is with men. If I could preach justification to be bought by you at a sovereign a piece, who would go out of the place without being justified? If I could preach justification to you by walking a hundred miles, would we not be pilgrims to-morrow morning, every one of us? If I were to preach justification which would consist in whippings and torture, there are very few here who would not whip themselves, and that severely too. But when it is freely, freely, freely, men turn away. What! Am I to have it for nothing at all, without doing anything?" Yes, Sir, you are to have it for nothing, or else not at all; it is "freely." "But may I not go to Christ, lay some claim to his mercy, and say, Lord, justify me because I am not so bad as others?" It will not do, Sir, because it is "by his grace." "But may I not indulge a hope, because I go to church twice a day?" No, Sir; it is "by his grace." "But may I not offer this plea I mean to be better?" No, sir; it is "by his grace." You insult God by bringing your counterfeit coin to pay for his treasures. Oh! what poor ideas men have of the value of Christ's gospel, if they think they can buy it! God will not have your rusty farthings to buy heaven with.

Yet, it was not “free” in an absolute sense... no, it cost an incredible price!

E. Purchased By Christ Jesus

vs. 24 “...justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

1. Many images of Christ’s accomplishment on the cross
2. Image here: redemption... payment of a ransom

Definition of redemption: release of a helpless captive by the payment of a price

3. Old Testament pictures of redemption
 - a. God redeemed Israel from the land of slavery
 - b. After Exdous Passover: firstborn redeemed so they would not perish
 - c. kinsman redeemer

Leviticus 25:25 “If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some property, his nearest relative may come and redeem it...”

- d. Job’s Redeemer

Job 19:25 “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh will I see God.”

4. Christ is our redeemer; he paid our redemption

Matthew 20:28 “The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Ransom = price paid to free a kidnap victim from danger

Here, the ransom price = Christ’s life, poured out in blood from the cross

1 Peter 1:18-19 “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down from you but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

Danger = Eternity in hell under the wrath of God

Our justification was extremely expensive, paid for by the most valuable substance that has ever been seen on this earth... the blood of the only begotten Son of God

He is our redeemer, and he paid for our salvation with his own blood

V. Summary & Application

A. Summary: Justification is:

1. Prepared and Proclaimed, Not Accomplished, by the Law
2. Performed by God
3. Procured by Faith in Christ
4. Provided By Grace
5. Purchased By Christ Jesus

B. A Closing Illustration: Faith for Justification

Faith is something like this. There is a story told of a captain of a man-of-war, whose son — a young lad — was very fond of running up the rigging of the ship; and one time, running after a monkey, he ran up the mast, till at last he got on to the maintruck. Now, the maintruck, you are aware, is like a large round table put on to the mast, so that when the boy was on the maintruck there was plenty of room for him; but the difficulty was — to use the best explanation I can — that he could not reach the mast that was under the table, he was not tall enough to get down from this maintruck, reach the mast, and so descend. There he was on the maintruck; he managed to get up there, somehow or other, but down he never could get. His father saw that, and he looked up in horror; what was he to do? In a few moments his son would fall down, and be dashed to pieces! He was clinging to the maintruck with all his might, but in a little time he would fall down on the deck, and there he would be a mangled corpse. The captain called for a speaking trumpet; he put it to his mouth, and shouted, "Boy, the next time the ship lurches, throw yourself into the sea." It was, in truth, his only way of escape; he might be picked up out of the sea, but he could not be rescued if he fell on the deck. The poor boy looked down on the sea; it was a long way; he could not bear the idea of throwing himself into the roaring current beneath him; he thought it looked angry and dangerous. How could he cast himself down into it? So he clung to the main truck with all his might, though there was no doubt that he must soon let go and perish. The father called for a gun, and pointing it up at him, said, "Boy, the next time the ship lurches, throw yourself into the sea, or I'll shoot you!" He knew his father would keep his word; the ship lurched on one side, over went the boy splash into the sea, and out went brawny arms after him; the sailors rescued him, and brought him on deck. Now, we, like the boy, are in a position of extraordinary danger, by nature, which neither you nor I can possibly escape of ourselves. Unfortunately, we have got some good works of our own, like that maintruck, and we cling to them so fondly, that we never will give them up. Christ knows that unless we do give them up, we shall be dashed to pieces at the last, for that

rotten trust must ruin us. He, therefore, says, "Sinner, let go your own trust, and drop into the sea of my love." We look down, and say, "Can I be saved by trusting in God? He looks as if he were angry with me, and I could not trust him." Ah, will not mercy's tender cry persuade you? — "He that believeth shall be saved." Must the weapon of destruction be pointed directly at you? Must you hear the dreadful threat — "He that believeth not shall be damned?" It is with you now as with that boy — your position is one of imminent peril in itself, and your slighting the Father's counsel is a matter of more terrible alarm, it makes peril more perilous. You must do it, or else you perish! Let go your hold! Trust in Christ and Him alone!

William Cowper

"There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins; and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

E'er since by faith I saw the stream thy flowing wounds supply, redeeming love has been my theme and shall be till I die!"

- Tragic childhood, lost mother at age six and was immediately sent off to a vicious boarding school where he was terrorized by a boy nine years older than him
- Attempted suicide numerous times, almost succeeded; was convinced that God could never forgive that sin, that he was damned, and that there was no hope for him
- He became more and more depressed; sat & stared out a window for hours on end
- Finally, in December of 1763, he was committed by his family to the St. Alban's Insane Asylum in London
- Dr. Nathaniel Cotton, poet and evangelical believer ministered to him there as a chaplain; he loved Cowper and held out hope to him for six months
- Left Bible out in places where he could read it
- Two stages of salvation: first, a contemplation of Jesus' power in raising Lazarus from the dead & his compassion... Cowper said a similar resurrection was about to take place in his soul
- Urged by revelation in his mind to open to Romans 3:25, "whom God set forth as a propitiation through faith in his blood..."

"Immediately I received the strength to believe it and the full beams of the sun of righteousness shone upon me; I saw the sufficiency of the atonement he had made, my pardon sealed in his blood, and all the fullness and completeness of justification. In a moment I believed and received the gospel! Unless the Almighty Arm had been under me I think I should have died with gratitude and joy. My eyes filled with tears

and my voice choked with transport. I could only look to heaven in silent fear, overwhelmed with love and wonder!!”