

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV) ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Romans 1:16-17 (ESV) ¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

Isaiah 32:17 (NLT2) ¹⁷ And this righteousness will bring peace. Yes, it will bring quietness and confidence forever. Amen.

I have been given the privilege to preach and teach the best news in all the world, what the Bible calls the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. Accepting and understanding the Good News as God intends for us to do can thrill us to the bone. The Good News gives us motivation every day to get out of bed and live to serve the Lord Jesus with all of our hearts. The Gospel is the power of God that saves you for eternity. The Gospel operating inside of you lifts you up to new heights in order for you to soar as an eagle. The Gospel operating inside of you can pick you up from the pit and set you firmly on solid ground. I am speaking in particular of the power of the Gospel functioning in the life of every believer. One of my favorite authors, Dr Bridges loudly says, “preach the Gospel to yourself every day.” It is my goal for all of us to hear the Gospel a bit more distinctly in this sermon and have the power of the Gospel change us exactly where we need to be changed throughout Lent, even as babies need to be changed periodically. The power of the Gospel takes away the smell of sin and gives to you the fragrance of Christ, a most necessary change indeed.

Paul writes, “I am not ashamed of the Gospel...for in it the righteousness of God is revealed.” Friends, **1. Jesus never sinned**. Not that long ago I spent time ruminating the fact that Jesus never sinned. I see this as a foundation for everything. Pondering the sinlessness of Christ can open a door that will bring healing to your wounded soul. Spending time on this rejuvenated me and I wanted to shout out, “Alleluia, Jesus never sinned.” **2. In theological terms we call this the righteousness of Jesus Christ.**

What does the term righteous mean in the Bible? **3. The term means perfect obedience; a righteous person is one who always does what is right** (Jerry Bridges, Bob Bevington, *The Bookends of the Christian Life*, pg. 19). Friends, according to the Bible's way of thinking there is an objective standard of right and wrong. God the Creator has specific moral absolutes that never change, such as the 10 commandments and what Jesus calls the 2 greatest commandments. God's laws are written on our hearts the Bible says. There is an external standard, an objective standard of right and wrong. Dr Bridges writes, "That standard is the universal moral will of God revealed in the Bible and it is the standard by which each person will be ultimately judged" (ibid pg. 19, Romans 2:12-16).

Our problem is we're not righteous (ibid.pg. 9) **4. The Bible says, "None is righteous, no not one" (Romans 3:10).** Is any person here perfectly righteous? I want to hear a resounding "No"! Some of us including your pastor might think, "We're not all that bad. "After all, we don't steal, murder, or engage in sexual immorality, or take illegal drugs." "We follow the laws of the land, and we are kind one to another." "Pastor, please say things that make me feel good about myself."

Friends, here is God's standard given to us by God Himself. **Jesus was asked, "Which is the great commandment in the Law?" Jesus responded, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind." "And a second is like it." "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." "On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets"** (Matthew 22:36-40). **5. God has set a standard that none of us can ever meet or even come close to meeting.** Paul wrote, "For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them'" (Gal 3:10).

I spent 12 years in higher education after high school and should have done it in 8 years. I never claim to be the brightest light bulb in the room. I was still in school at 30 years of age. In

grad school a few of the professors would choose to grade on a curve. That meant you could earn a higher score than you actually deserved. Most of the professors refused to do so. God does not grade our lives on a curve. God's standard is perfection. If God gave to us a final exam, scoring 99 percent on the test would mean failing the course. One little misspelled word would earn an F (ibid. pg. 20). No school grades like this and if they did no one would graduate.

Friends, God does not grade on a curve. We can read about the scandalous sins of the day and think ourselves as being pretty good people. God must be pleased with us. Look at all the sins we refrain from. After all, we're better than "they" are (ibid pg. 20). This is my point, if you only sin once in your life, that one sin is enough to keep you out of heaven, from receiving the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Just one sin and you are doomed, damned forever under God's curse.

Friends, the curse does not have the final word. **6. God has a cure for the curse and the cure is Jesus the Christ.** The Gospel, the Good News of Jesus is this, **"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal 3:13).** Dr. Bridges writes, **7. "Let this truth sink deeply into your heart and mind: apart from the saving work of Christ, every one of us still deserves God's curse every day of our lives" (ibid. pg 21).** "Pastor, I am not all that bad." "What about the sin of pride, putting yourself before God, selfishness, impatience, having a critical spirit, and all those other behaviors we tolerate every day?" "Even on our best days, we still have not loved God or our neighbor as we should."

Friends, this is why it is best to preach the Gospel to yourself every day. "Jesus, thank you for going to the cross and bearing the curse that I deserve." "Thank you for carrying all of my sins and dying for them." "Thank you that I am completely forgiven in Jesus' name."

I do not like my long-term memory. I don't remember what I ate for dinner last night, but I can remember the smallest of my sins, and worse, those sins that harmed other people. And when I remember them, I feel the guilt and I do not like that feeling. Worse than the guilt, is

feeling the shame of those things that occurred when I was in middle school. Guilt is that inner tug telling you that you have done something against God. Shame is worse. When you carry the weight of shame with you, you feel absolutely worthless and like your entire life is a mistake. You can be a Christian and still feel these emotions and these emotions can be one's undoing, one's unraveling, ending in one's demise. The feeling of being a complete failure is too much to bear. And that feeling is an absolute lie from the pit of hell.

Here is the solution and the solution is Jesus. Jesus never sinned. Jesus never had any guilt or shame. He aced every test. Jesus was and is perfectly righteous in every way. He does all things right and Jesus never changes. Jesus literally bore your curse on the cross. He took all of your sins upon Himself and paid the price for your salvation with his perfect blood. The blood of Jesus cleanses you of all sin and you will never die. The blood of Jesus means you are completely forgiven, and God will never hold those sins against you.

The good news is Jesus also bore all of your guilt, all of your shame, and all of your griefs. Those of us loaded with guilt and shame must preach the Gospel to ourselves every day. Doing this can raise us to higher levels as the power of God, the power of the Gospel heals your wounded soul. God's grace has saved you for all eternity. The lies of the enemy want to put you in the pit. The Gospel is the cure and by rehearsing the Gospel to yourself every day, that discipline can keep you alive and from doing yourself in. This attitude of self-condemnation is detrimental to one's being. God says, "There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Because of the Good News of Jesus Christ your best days are always ahead of you. Faith in Jesus has its benefits. Please rehearse those benefits and don't ever forget them.

Jesus never sinned. His righteousness is a perfect righteousness and God has placed that perfect righteousness inside of you. God's grace has come and saved you by faith. You have been justified in God's sight. **8. That means God looks at you and sees you as if you**

have never sinned. 9. God looks at you and sees you as if you have always obeyed. The blood of Christ has cleansed you forever. God's love for you is not based on your personal performance. It is based on the life, death, and resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ our Lord. The Father loves you the same amount that He loves Jesus. Friends, we are all fragile and easily broken, the Good News puts us back together again and makes us stronger than ever in Christ.

What thrills me to the bone is the fact that Jesus never sinned and His perfect record has been put on your account and my account, put in God's gradebook. That Good News saves us forever as we put our faith in Christ. God has imputed inside of you, placed inside of you the righteousness of Jesus Christ. There is no greater gift at all. You have the greatest gift of all, Jesus, your righteousness.

I end this sermon quoting from the book I am using for the Lenten series. Paul understood what it meant to be justified by faith and it gave him the courage to move forward with Christ in spite of his murderous past. "For Paul, justification was not only a past event; it was also a daily present reality. So every day of his life, by faith in Christ, Paul realized he stood righteous in the sight of God – he was counted righteous and accepted by God as righteous – because of the perfectly obedient life and death Christ provided for him. He stood solely on the rock-solid righteousness of Christ alone.... We must learn to live like the apostle Paul, looking every day outside ourselves to Christ and seeing ourselves standing before God clothed in His perfect righteousness. Every day we must re-acknowledge the fact that there's nothing we can do to make ourselves either more acceptable to God or less acceptable. Regardless of how much we grow in our Christian lives we are accepted for Christ's sake or not accepted at all. It is the reliance on Christ alone, apart from any consideration of our good or bad deeds, that enables us to experience the daily the reality of peace, and joy, and comfort, and gratitude (ibid pg. 29).

I close with these verses. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV) ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (MSG) ²¹ How? you say. In Christ. God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God. Isaiah 32:17 (NLT2) ¹⁷ And this righteousness will bring peace. Yes, it will bring quietness and confidence forever. Amen.