

Call on the Name of the Lord

Lord, Lord

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Today's sermon is titled "Call on the Name of the Lord."

Today our readings spoke deeply on another core doctrine of the Christian faith. It is one of those, in my still limited experience, rare instances where the lectionary is hyper-focused on an issue. This doctrine is none other than that of Salvation, or Soteriology. How is man saved? I know I say this a lot, but entire books have been written about this subject. Entire books, actually, have been written about specific parts of salvation or even individual theories of salvation. I am not here tonight/this morning to discuss the various theories of how Christ's death earned us forgiveness, and there are many to discuss. Not to imply all of them are valid or worth much consideration, like, for example, the erroneous idea that the sole Sovereign of Creation offered His Son as a payment or bribe to the Devil, a created being, only for Jesus to rise from the dead, thereby tricking the Devil out of the souls of man. Rather, I want to talk about how that saving righteousness becomes imputed to us. But, of course, before we discuss that, we must first examine the state of man before Christ's righteousness is given to him.

It should come as no surprise for anyone here that mankind's situation without Christ is summed up in one word: miserable. We live in a universe with a wholly Just and wholly Righteous God. He has, in His truly infinite wisdom, prescribed commandants to live by. These include the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, the first and second Greatest Commandant, and far too many others to name. These moral laws are, on the surface, seeming so easy to the point of being considered remedial. However, as each and every one of us here knows all too well, they're much harder to put into practice than they look. Every day even the greatest saint among us breaks these rules so much as to lose count. Willingly let your eyes drift carnally to a member of the opposite sex? [Matthew 5:28](#), "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Trusting in your physique and

abilities to provide for yourself and your family rather than the God who gave them to you? [Exodus 20:3](#), “You shall have no other gods before me.” Discussed a rumor about a friend behind their back? [Exodus 20:16](#), “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” Or even downloaded a song you liked from YouTube rather than buying the album? [Exodus 20:15](#), ““You shall not steal.” Martin Luther in his Small Catechism breaks many of the ways we break God’s law daily, and some of them are more subtle than “I literally murdered another person.” God’s commandments aren’t meant to be read so woodenly literal that anything outside of the literal words used is fair game. That sort of view is what the Pharisees believed, and that which Jesus criticized them so heavily for. For example, Jesus takes the commandment against adultery from [Exodus 20:14](#), “You shall not commit adultery,” and states that you don’t have to actually, bodily, commit adultery to be guilty of the sin as quoted before from Matthew. And if your own experiences aren’t enough, Scriptures tells us of man’s undeniable guilt. Paul in [Romans 3:10](#), “as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one;” Or from John in [1 John 1:8](#), “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

So, we find ourselves heavy laden with sin and condemned. But, condemned to what, exactly? Like our secular laws, there are punishments for breaking God’s laws. And we’re not ignorant of what the punishments are, or, rather, is. In no uncertain terms, Paul in [Romans 6:23](#), “For the wages of sin is death.” This is bad news. But before worrying, let’s ask what kind of death it is? It wouldn’t be too bad if it was merely a physical death that led to an almost blissful state of non-existence. But [Revelation 21:8](#), “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” begs to differ. For these people, those who sin, dying physically is simply what brings them to the “second death”, that is perdition, damnation, or, simply, Hell. Now, the modern conception of Hell is perverted terribly by popular culture building off of extra-Biblical ideas originating from the, admittedly, great poets Milton and Dante. To be clear, I cannot tell you precisely what Hell will be like. I can tell you certainly, though, that Satan is not some sort of ruler there nor do fallen angels--demons-- torture people with pitchforks. Satan and his ilk are down there for the same sentence as everyone else. To quote Jesus on what will be said to those found without saving righteousness

on that Day of Judgement, [Matthew 25:41](#), ““Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” And as for how literal the fire is, I cannot say. Regardless of actual physical description, it is, by definition, the worst possible place that can exist where one will suffer the worst possible fate. And mankind has, by its daily and repeated sins, earned and merited a spot there. By disobeying an infinitely holy God and sinning against His creation, His image in us, and against Him Himself, we’ve warranted such a horrible fate.

It is in this context that Jesus Christ, Son of God, enters the stage. God took on human flesh, became incarnate, perfectly fulfilled the law which we could not, and then died in our place for our sins and perfectly paid for them in full. His perfect righteousness is imparted to us. It is thanks to Christ that we don’t have to spend eternity in Hell, but rather we get to spend it in the New Heaven and New Earth that God makes after the Parousia or the Second Coming of His Son. And here we come to the crux, pardon the pun, of the matter. How does His righteousness become ours? At what point can we rest knowing that our souls are secured and sealed by the Blood of the Lamb? And here we’ll turn to our readings today. From the Old Testament, out of the book of the minor prophet Hosea, we see Israel in one of her moments of great apostasy where each man did what was right in his own eyes. In the opening verse, [Hosea 5:15](#), we get this powerful image as God declares He will hide His face from them until they confess, repent, and seek Him. And in the closing verse, [Hosea 6:6](#), we get this phrase that would have shocked any pious Temple-going Israelite, “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” God says that it isn’t the burnt offerings, the ones that are supposed to take away the sin of Israel, He is looking for, but “steadfast love” and “the knowledge of God.” This radical notion is echoed in our Psalm. In verses 8-13 God rebukes the idea of Him, the Almighty being outside of space and time that is beyond our understanding, needing sacrifices like pagan idols. Instead of this sacrifice system, what does God ask for? [Psalm 50:14-15](#), “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.” He asks for a correct position towards Him instead of ritualistic observance. And, from outside of our readings, we have this single verse of utmost importance, [Hebrews 10:4](#), “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away

sins.” The actions of man, including the sacrifices of the Old Testament, cannot bring righteousness to us. If it isn’t through an action, then how?

In our reading from the Book of Romans, Paul tells us this, [Romans 4:13](#), “For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.” And he quotes [Genesis 15:6](#), “And he [Abraham] believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” He says those words weren’t just written for Abraham’s sake, [Romans 4:24](#), “but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord.” That is to say, our faith in God, in Jesus, is what transfers the perfect righteousness of Christ to us. Or, succinctly put in a single verse, [Ephesians 2:8](#) “For by grace you have been saved through faith.” Or, further yet, as that verse that is so well known you can even order it stamped on your checks, [John 3:16](#), “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” It is not the good works we do or do not do, it is not the sins we manage to not commit, but it is simply our faith and trust in Him who promised to never again remember our trespasses. And as heirs to the Protestant tradition, we recall this as one of the Five Solae, *sola fide* - by faith alone. And this faith-based salvation is a beautiful thing that clearly demonstrates God’s love and the richness of his mercy. He knows that we are miserable sinners who of their own accord could never choose to follow the law. Rather than saying “too bad, so sad,” and leaving us to the punishment we’ve rightfully earned, He sent His Son for us to believe in and be granted clemency through His atoning work. I’ll mention here in this sermon what I’ve mentioned in another sermon, this faith is, in some aspect, a miraculous gift of God. It comes to us, in some part, from the Holy Spirit. This is where the “by grace” part of “by grace through faith” comes in. With that being said, we even read of a story that demonstrates what faith does to a person. In our Gospel reading, we read of the woman with the issue of blood. Her faith in Jesus was so great that she believed what no doctor could do despite the sums she paid them, the fringe of Jesus’ robe could do. And it did. She was healed, and Jesus said, “Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” So, it is with us, but instead of a particular physical ailment, it’s a spiritual sickness. Our faith in Him is how that balm of Gilead is applied to our sin-sick soul.

And, as mentioned earlier, we certainly need it. Jesus reminds us of this state in our Gospel reading as well, [Matthew 9:12-13](#), “But when he heard it, he said, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.” For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’” And we’re reminded of our sorry state in [John 3:18](#), “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.” And so, our salvation through faith in Christ is the one thing we must work to not forget or lose sight of. Yes, we are sinners. Yes, we transgress God’s perfect laws. Yes, we do things that we deeply regret, and yes, we do things that hurt ourselves and each other. But Jesus knew all of that and still chose to die for you and for me. There is no sin so great that God’s love is not greater still yet. We know this because Jesus gave up unimaginable glory to die for us. He suffered torture and a humiliating death on the cross. No greater sacrifice has ever, nor will ever, be made. It was the ultimate sacrifice in the literal sense of the word, that is to say, the last. And though it happened at a particular time, in a particular place, the effect of His death saves souls from the Garden all the way to Armageddon. All those whose faith is placed in Him who was sent, will be saved. You will have moments of doubt, you will feel deep pangs of regret for your willful disobedience, you may sometimes even think yourself a reprobate and beyond God’s grace. But through all those feelings and thoughts, some of which the Devil may very well whisper to you to sow discord, you have to remember that God has promised complete forgiveness and remission of sins for those who place their faith in Christ. God does not lie. His promises do not fail. If He says, believe and be saved, then believe and be saved you shall be. That’s why Christ is called the cornerstone. It’s why we sing that old hymn which states our hope is built on “nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.” And so, each day, take a moment here and there to remember in whom your faith is placed. Take a moment to ask and consider like the jailer did, “What must I do to be saved?” Ponder this sweet reply, “believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” And then, like that wretched man of a profession hated by all his countrymen, Saint Matthew, rise and follow Him who bought you with His precious blood.

Let us offer a prayer of thanks to Jesus Christ for His atoning work on the cross and His righteousness which He gives freely to those who believe and let us pray

for us to remember and keep our faith close at hand in these latter days.

Amen, and amen.