“The Most Powerful Sentence Ever Written”

January 14, 2018

Genesis 18:23-33

Please open your Bible today to the 3rd chapter of Romans.

One of God’s deepest desires for us must be that we become like Him. And, since there is no way we could ever be like Him by our own power or effort, God made a way for us. *Our* natural desires are for ourselves. We love our-*selves*. We love our *sins*. Yet, God, in His love, works on each of us to turn us from self to Himself.

So, in order to become like God, He provides something for us; a Free Gift; a completely free, no strings attached, Free Gift, the Only thing that will ensure our ever becoming like Him – His Righteousness. You see, God in His infinite wisdom found a way to put inside of you the only thing that enables you to make spiritual progress; the condition we know as righteousness. He sets you on a new road to becoming like Him. He gives to you the one quality you could never in a million years gain on your own – Righteousness.

As I read the Bible I’m learning that God wants to make each one of you right. So, today’s topic is righteousness and the title for today’s sermon is this “The Most Powerful Sentence Ever Written.” Shall we pray?

Just about a week ago, I was speaking with a woman who said this to me (now, remember, she’s not a Christian); she said this about her neighbor, who she does not get along with; and that neighbor *does* claim to be a Christian. Here’s what she said. *“I’m tired of all of his righteous acts.”*

Now, I wouldn’t be able to tell you the rest of what she said. But this should show you that righteousness as well as unrighteousness affects your day-to-day life.

The topic here in Romans three is righteousness. And, as I’ve already said, it’s a subject that is especially dear to the LORD’s heart.

Now, here’s the reason I say it’s so precious to Him. Why did Christ die? Why did the Father send His Only Begotten Son into the world? Why was Jesus falsely arrested, illegally tried, found guilty and then crucified? The reason for all that was because no one, by birth or by choice, is righteous. You aren’t naturally right with God. You should ask the same question Ancient Job asked Job 25:4 *“How then can man be justified [made right] with God?”*

What did God do? In His faithful love for you and me, He gave His Son to pay for all the unrighteous acts that we human beings have committed over the centuries.

Now, if you’ve got your Bible open, go with me to this third chapter of Romans. And, see if you can find with me the most powerful sentence ever written. It’s right here.

Romans 3:21*“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; (22) Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference:*

*(23) For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (24) Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:*

*(25) Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; (26) To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”*

Have you located the most powerful sentence ever written? Well, let me ask it another way. Did you notice that this entire passage from verse 21 thru verse 26 is just one sentence; one long sentence? And did you also notice that Paul uses a form of the word “righteousness” seven times in those six verses?

This week I had to have my car worked on. So, while I was waiting for the mechanic to finish, I took the oppor-tunity to strike up a conversation with another customer about his need to be saved. I had asked him if he had the assurance that he’d go to Heaven when he died. And, as soon as I spoke to him, it was obvious that I’d sparked something inside of him. He responded like this. *“I am definitely going to Hell.”* Then he followed that with his definition of God. “God,” he said, “is a law or an idea invented by religious people and philosophers to scare us and to control us because we don’t have any control over ourselves. He then told me that Jesus was dead. And he added this. “The one thing we need in this world is justice.” And that was it. He didn’t want to talk about it anymore. Our conversation was brief and to the point and somewhat over.

Now, folks, if everybody was as confident as this man in believing what *he* believed, there’d be no hope for anybody. And, yes, it’s true that everyone is entitled to his own opinion. But opinion without a foundation of facts is just speculation. You can only *hope* you are believing the right thing.

Fortunately, truth is simple. God isn’t an idea. He’s not merely a religious idea. Nor is He a philosophical invention designed by man to scare people into keeping themselves under control. And besides all that, the facts and history prove that Jesus Christ did rise from the dead.

Now, I did follow up and proceeded to speak to this man about having a *relationship* with the LORD, and not religion; in particular, about forgiveness for his sins. But he didn’t want to hear any of that. Period. And some would say he’s right; he’s going to Hell. But, not me. I’ve begun praying for him that the LORD would send laborers into His harvest field and bring this man to Himself because the Bible says that God is not willing that any should perish and that all should come to repentance.

So, folks, as you are about to see from the Bible, righteousness is the only answer. And a right relationship with God is only possible through a specific type of righteousness; the kind that Paul describes here.

Now, I’m sure you want to know why I say this is the greatest sentence ever written. Here’s why.

One, it presents **the greatest subject** known to man; being made right with God.

Two, it’s spoken by **the Greatest Person** in existence; God.

Three, it addresses **the greatest problem** we face; sin.

Four, it announces **the greatest thing** God ever did; He gave us His Son as a Propitiation for our sins.

And five, it offers us **the greatest gift** of all; the free gift of righteousness; so that when we receive this gift we are immediately forgiven for every sin we’ve ever committed.

All of that is found right here in this passage of Scripture.

Today, folks, I want you show you from your Bible that what you believe makes all the difference in the world as to whether you will find a way to God or not; and whether or not you are on the road to becoming like Him. It makes all the difference in the world what you believe.

Now you know I like history. But I also like English. And I’m convinced that one of the keys to your personal Bible study is what some Bible students call “phrasing.” If you look for phrases inside the passage you’re studying, you’ll see much more of what the LORD is saying.

So, for today I’m not asking you to Major in English. But I am asking you to look with me at the phrases Paul uses. A phrase, by the way, is a group of words that stand together as a unit – inside a sentence. What I’ve done is to divide this one sentence up into three phrases. And when I do that, I get it. I see clearly what the LORD is saying.

Romans 3:21*“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; (22) Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe:…”*

This is the first phrase of this sentence, this wonderful sentence. But, it sure says a lot.

1. First, it says that God’s righteousness is available apart from any good works you can do.

Romans 3:21*“But now the righteousness of God without the law*

*is manifested, [revealed] …”*

Do you remember the first two sons of Adam? Both came before God with an offering. Abel brought a lamb from the flock and he offered it. Cain brought the good works of his hands; the fruits of his labors in the field. And the Bible says that God was pleased with Abel’s offering and that He rejected Cain’s.

So, from the very beginning of time we see that man, by nature, refuses God’s way and insists on doing things *his* way.

God says that His way to righteousness is quote “apart from the Law.”

Ephesians 2:8 *“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: (9)****Not of works, lest any man should boast****.”*

You see, if it’s you, you boast. You might try to make a deal with God; to barter; to offer one thing so, in exchange, He’ll give you something else. We say “God, if you make my boss give me a raise, I’ll give you more money in the offering plate.” “If you heal me of this sickness, I promise I’ll serve you.” “If you get me out of this situation, I’ll \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

 “God, I’ll try my best and if my best isn’t good enough, so be it. You have to let me into Heaven because I’ve done the best I know to do.” And God simply says Titus 3:5 *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; (6) which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; …”*

You can never gain favor with God because of your efforts in trying to be good. God says that His righteousness is displayed apart from the law.

Works, efforts, deeds, trying our best to keep the law never, ever works. You see, if it’s works, then it’s not by grace that you are saved.

 Romans 11:6 *“And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: …”*

Galatians 2:16 *“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified [made righteous] by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified [made righteous].”*

First, the Scripture says that God’s righteousness is avail-

able apart from any good works you can do. Romans 3:21*“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, [revealed] …”*

Folks, every religion on the planet (and there are some 4,200, according to Wikipedia) is based upon works; your good works. And from the beginning of history until today this has always been true. Mankind tries all sorts of methods to come to God, while rejecting the way God has provided for us.

1. Second, God’s righteousness is testified to throughout

the Old Testament.

Romans 3:21*“But now the righteousness of God without the law*

*is manifested,* ***being witnessed by the law and the prophets****; …”*

There are many reasons why the Holy Spirit wrote the Books of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms and the history given to us in the Old Testament. And one of them is to reveal a simple reality. At our best we’re all sinners. But beyond that, the OT Books show us that, apart from God-given righteousness, no one could ever please the LORD.

For example, Jeremiah the Prophet tells us that the Source of our righteousness. Jeremiah 23:6 *“In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, The Lord Our Righteousness.”*

Isaiah makes it as plain as day. Our righteousnesses are not going to cut it with God. Isaiah 64:6 *“But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”*

Psalm 51:14 *“Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.”*

Psalm 71:24 *“My tongue also shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long: …”*

People all around the world have at least this one thing in common. We think that what matters in the end is “our” righteousnesses; how much good we did; how much effort we put in. And, having done a lot of good, we put our confidence, not in God, but in **us**. We think **we** are capable of doing enough good things to get us into Heaven, while all God says is that we must exercise faith in the accomplish-ments of Someone Else; the work that Christ accomplished on the Cross.

Can you see all this in the first phrase of this passage?

1. First, God’s righteousness is available apart from any good works you can do.
2. Second, God’s righteousness is testified to throughout the Old Testament.
3. And third, God’s righteousness is given to those who exercise faith in Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:21*“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; (22) Even* ***the righteousness of God which is by faith*** *of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: …”*

When you study your Bible, you can uncover some of the most glorious things. For example, Romans, the greatest book ever written, includes in this third chapter the greatest sentence ever written. And, from God’s heart to yours and mine, the subject is the greatest subject known to man; right-eousness.

The truth is that most people have gotten the completely wrong idea about it. They think they have to do something; to put forth more and more effort; to try harder and harder; to become a better person, thinking that God will judge them on the amount of effort they put in or by how many good things they’ve done. But, as you can see, righteousness is not for sale. The only righteousness God has available to you is His righteousness and you can only receive if by faith.

God’s righteousness is available. It’s offered to you apart

from any good works we can do. And it’s found by faith alone. Romans 3:22 *“Even the righteousness of God* ***which is by faith*** *of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: …”*

Beginning with Adam and Eve and on throughout all the pages of the history, you find that your righteousness; your effort; your goodness, is not what God requires for you to be saved. We just can’t make it on our own. We need help.

Genesis 15:6 *“And he [Abraham]* ***believed*** *in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness.”*

Daniel 9:28 *“O my God, incline thine ear, and hear; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name: for* ***we do not present*** *our supplications before thee for* ***our righteousnesses,*** *but for thy great mercies.”*

Habakkuk 2:4 *“Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but* ***the just shall live by his faith****.”*

The question for you is this. “Do you believe?” “Do you believe that what Christ did in dying on the Cross; that His death was the Payment for *your* sins? It’s a matter of faith; simple faith; child-like faith. Are you trusting Christ to give you what He achieved in His death on the Cross?

God is here today ready to bestow righteousness upon anyone who believes. Faith, that one thing that pleases God, is what God is looking for in you. So, yes, stop trusting in your baptism. Stop trusting in your efforts and your good deeds and your religious feelings. That’s not God’s way. His way is for you to come to Him through the door of faith. Open it up and He will come in.

Now, I said that I divided up this passage into three parts. This is the first part. Romans 3:21*“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; (22) Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: …”*

I’d like to leave the second and third parts to another time. So, let me conclude with this.

The Bible word picture God uses to describe His giving to us His own righteousness is a picture of putting your clothing on. Hear with me Isaiah and David and Job.

Isaiah 61:10 *“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for* ***he hath clothed me*** *with the garments of salvation,* ***he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness*** *…”*

Psalm 132:9 *“Let thy priests be* ***clothed with righteous-ness****; and let thy saints shout for joy.”*

Job 29:14 *“I put on righteousness, and* ***it clothed me****.”*

Back in the summer of 1967 a seventeen year old girl went for a swim in the Chesapeake Bay. She was not careful enough and dove from a raft into what she thought was deep water. It was shallow and she hit her head on the bottom of the bay. She immediately broke her fourth cervical vertebrae and immediately became a quadriplegic; no use of either her arms or her legs. Her sister rescued her from drowning.

Here it is now fifty years later. Janet and I listened to the testimony of Joni Eareckson Tada recently regarding her newest book.

Now, here’s what I want you to think with me about. Every morning one of Joni’s friends comes to her house to help her bathe and to dress her. Joni Eareckson Tada is a helpless quadriplegic. She’s been that way now for fifty years.

Here’s how she describes it. *“And look, I don’t need to list all the things my quadriplegia prevents me from doing – and, for the most part I’m okay with that. But that one thing that I really wish I could do is, dress myself. I can’t pull on a sweater or a coat, button a jacket. I can’t pull up my slacks or my nylons, slip into a skirt or hop into shorts.*

*Sometimes when a friend is trying to put on my sweater, my fingers get stuck in the sleeve or I lose my balance and start to fall over. It can be a little frustrating at times. No, I can’t clothe myself. I wish I could do it for myself because it is, after all, a rather private thing, rather personal. And so, in the past, I have always looked at it as a problem, but thankfully, this “problem” has always driven me to God for help.”* [Found on [www.joniandfriends.org](http://www.joniandfriends.org) “clothed In Righteousness”].

Everyone here is able to get up each day and dress himself or herself. But, imagine if every day someone had to come to your home, help you get out of bed, and then dress you. Wouldn’t you feel helpless? Wouldn’t that be humiliating? Wouldn’t you be totally humbled all the time?

Let me clue you in on what God says is the only way you can obtain His righteousness. He and He alone must dress you with His own Righteousness. Isaiah 61:10 *“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for* ***he hath clothed me*** *with the garments of salvation,* ***he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness*** *…”*

That’s the essence of Romans 3:21-22. And, if you think there’s any other way to gain it than through simple faith, then you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. You will never walk with God either in this world or the next. You must be dressed by God with God’s robe of righteousness or you won’t get in. God is the God Who desires to clothe you. And with what? He dresses you in His own righteous robe. That’s what happens when you come to Him like Joni, helpless and spiritually hopeless without the help of Heaven itself.

Here’s a hymn that describes it far better than I could. It’s called. “Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness” by the Father of the Moravians, Count Nicolaus Zinzendorf. Think about what a difference it will make in your life if this was true of you.

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness,
My beauty are, my glorious dress
Midst flaming worlds, in these array'd,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

When from the dust of death I rise
To claim my mansion in the skies,
E'en then shall this be all my plea,
‘Jesus hath liv'd - hath died for me.’

Bold shall I stand in that great day:
For who aught to my charge shall lay,
If through Thy blood absolved I am
From sin's tremendous curse and shame?

This spotless robe the same appears,
When ruined nature sinks in years;
No age can change its glorious hue,
The robe of Christ is ever new.

“A dear dying friend drew near her end. Before her illness

she had been, as St. Paul, of the sect of Pharisees working *FOR* her salvation, but found no rest in her soul. After she was stricken with illness, she was greatly concerned, for no longer had she strength to continue her supposed good works, and she had no peace.

One day, when lying on her sofa, she took the Book of God in her hand, and read; her attention was riveted; and after a while she suddenly exclaimed, “Oh! I see it now; I have never before understood this. It is as a flash of light-ning. Jesus is my righteousness; He is my salvation.”

Subsequently she often spoke of this, repeating, after long and silent thought, "I wonder at my blindness." "I can compare the change that came over me to nothing but light-ning." As the end drew nigh she frequently spoke of the nearness of Jesus; saying, at times, "He is so near I feel as though I could touch Him;" and when the hour was come, so gently did the spirit take its flight, we could but say, knowing her faith, "She has but fallen asleep-in Jesus." [Found on [www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org) “Jehovah Tsidkenu”].

One of the great Bible scholars of the 20th century was

Dr. Alva J. McClain. McClain puts it this way. “The gospel is the power of God for salvation because in the gospel is a revelation. And that revelation is a manifestation of the righteousness of God. That is the reason the gospel has the power to save a sinner. Man has no righteousness.

But God, in the gospel, has provided a righteousness. And He gives that to men if he will only take it. This fact makes Christianity different from every other religion the world has ever seen. Every great scheme to save men has failed on just one point.

Its success depended on man's righteousness, when in reality there is no righteousness in man. Christianity attacks the problem at this point of righteousness. It recognizes that man has no right-eousness. And then brings the righteousness of God and clothes that man in that righteousness and saves him.”

Righteousness is God’s first spiritual gift. It’s given at the moment you put your trust in Christ. From that moment on into eternity God views you as a righteous soul. There are no more blots on your record. God, the Righteous Judge looks at you and sees a New Creation. When then, is your Christian Life, but a coming to believe that every righteous thing you do is an expression of His Son Who lives in you. Jesus Christ is my Righteousness.

Is the LORD your righteousness? If not, why not?

Here’s the only thing you can do. Acknowledge that your sin is what separates you from God. And when you repent of your sins and believe on the LORD Jesus Christ, you will be saved. You will be clothed with the very Righteousness of Christ Himself.

* To Repent - to change your mind about God, Christ, your sin, and God’s free gift of salvation.
* To Believe - to simply trust Jesus Christ alone as the One Who paid the entire penalty for your sins.

 Jesus Christ paid the penalty for every sin you ever

committed. He became your Substitute on the day He died on Calvary two thousand years ago.

This is the greatest news in all the world. The Father gave Only His Son to pay the penalty for all your sins. Jesus died on the Cross as your Substitute and He wants to be your Savior today. Won’t you cry out to Him for His free gift of salvation? What could possibly hold you back from having a saving relationship with your Creator?

Think about the LORD as the One Who loves you and delights to have you as His Child and to have you know and understand Him. He delighted in purchasing salvation in order to bring His forgiveness into your heart. John 3:16 *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

The Sinner’s Prayer. *“Father, I realize I am a sinner. I believe that Jesus died in my place on the cross. I repent of my sins. I want to be completely forgiven today. I am trusting you right now to save me. Thank you. Amen”*

Jesus said, Revelation 3:20 *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with Me.”*

Shall we pray?

Hymn # 583 “You Are My All In All”