

The Forgiveness of Sins

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Now in the book of Psalms 86, verse five: for Thou Lord are good and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee. Then in the book of Acts, there is a statement made by Paul: be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And by Him, all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Now, I want to talk about one of the bluntest, most simple things, the forgiveness of sin. And while religion is in itself, naturally beautiful. Incidentally, I'd like to say that I don't think in all of my Christian experience, I saw a more dignified, touching, and beautiful baby dedication in this one this morning, have you? There's something about the simplicity of the direct approach that's always beautiful.

And so, religion ought to be beautiful, not by ornate decoration, but by this that we saw, a direct, simple, unaffected approach to the things of God. But we like to fancify it and pretty it up and give it favor by identifying it with popular causes and give it a certain kind of beauty by identifying it with art and music and every kind of symbolism and give it respectability by relating it to learning. This we tried to do. And I think the reason for it is that simplicity isn't present. We were not simple about it, because we're frightened. There's a deep shame of heart. We have known a painful, humiliating thing--that is sin. And this deeply disgraceful thing that we call sin, shocks and embarrasses and humiliates. And so, we tried to cover it up and make religion to be simply a seeking after God or a seeking after truth. And thus, we cover the fact that we're sinners, that we need to be forgiven, just plain forgiven and cleansed by the blood of Jesus.

Now, the presence of our sin is one of the most shameful and embarrassing things in the world. And to save face, we have stigmatized certain sins and generally agree upon them. We agree to place the hand of infamy, or point the finger of infamy, upon certain great gross sins. And that makes us of course feel righteous by comparison. But all sin before God is a serious thing. God, being who He is and what He is, and we being what we are, and sin, being the filth of the human spirit as it is, we are able to endure our own consciences only by refusing to admit the infamy of our sins by excusing or blaming on others, or cultivating a brazen face like a tavern hostess, and so destroying our sense of shame.

But you will find a great deal in the Bible. In fact, if we wouldn't take it out of the Bible, this thought that God forgives people, that God forgives people. People must be forgiven, and God forgives people. If you take that out of the Bible, you really don't have much Bible left. It would be so thin that you would think that you had nothing but the covers left. The whole basis of the Bible, or the whole reason for its existence, is that there was a race that has fallen into sin. And that that sin is an injurious, harmful, degrading and destructive and alienating thing. And that it's got to be dealt with.

Now, that's the Bible. The Bible is full of it, the whole book of Psalms is full of it. And the prophecies of the Old Testament speak of it. And our Lord refers to it and the apostles. It's throughout all the Scriptures. So, we must deal with this vital problem, or somebody must deal with this vital problem for us, the disposition of our sins. What am I going to do with my sin?

Now, this is so huge and so overwhelming--a disaster--this sin thing, that it demands a solution. Somebody is going to have to deal with this, this polio. They're talking about polio. Only one in hundreds of 1000s are touched with polio; cancer, only one in many 1000s, perhaps, and other diseases, heart failure. They scared most man above 40 to death last week. It was heart week, and you couldn't flip a radio or look at a paper but what somebody was yelling at you, look out for your heart.

And I've got all the symptoms, myself, listening to the to the fellows tell about it. And they tell us, look out for our hearts. Well, heart trouble is a serious thing. But friends, you can add up polio and cancer and heart failure, and you still have nothing compared with this one serious thing. This overwhelming disaster, which is come upon the human race, this thing we call sin, that is so huge and so vast and so crushing that it adds up too or is greater than all of the other disasters added together.

And so, I say it demands a satisfactory solution. We dare not, my Christian people, we dare not deal with it as some have tried to do. We dare not deal with it by renaming it. You can rename cancer, but it still kills. You can refuse to believe that it's a heart, but the heart may still kill. You can call a gun by some other name, but if it goes off when pointed at you, it will still destroy you. And yet some have tried to do it. Rename it, rethink it, and buy a new nomenclature, that is, a set of names for things related to sin, we'll hoped that we might have gotten away with it. But no, we haven't. We haven't disposed of it. It's got to be satisfactorily disposed of. And either it must be removed from the soul, or it will remove the soul from the presence of God forever.

Now, this is true. This is true of you. It's true of me. It's true of my family. It's true of those I love the most. It is true of all the good people, and it's true of all the bad people. And it's true of all the white people and of all the dark-skinned peoples. It's true of the great men and it's true of the forgotten, faceless multitudes who mill the streets. It is true of every individual. Either we must

find a satisfactory solution for this sin problem, and it must be removed from our soul, or it will remove our soul from the presence of God.

Now, to the sincere man nothing else matters, I think. And yet, it's evident that there are various ways of trying to get rid of it. There are those, as you know, in foreign lands who try every means of getting rid of sin, every effort. I saw a picture on The Daily News of a man who had stood up all his life. He won't lie down. You saw it maybe. He wouldn't lie down. He was a man I would judge to be 55 years old or older. And he's never lain down since he entered the religious order. He stands up even to sleep.

Now that's a touching thing, that that man knows what a lot of Christians don't know. That the most crushing, destructive thing in the world is sin. The most lethal disease ever to visit the human heart is sin, and He knows he has it. And he thinks that if he stands up all his life, somewhere, a good God will say, well, we can't punish that fellow, because he has stood up and tried to atone for his sin. How tragic that a man can stand up all his life, and yet not remove sin from his soul.

Now, I'm glad for David's wonderful text. It's so good to hear David say in that 86th Psalm, that Thou, O God, art good and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy unto all of them that calleth on Thee. And I'm glad for the word in the New Testament, be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man Jesus is preached unto you, the forgiveness of sin; to the most sinful age in the history of the world, that has succeeded in euthanizing its sin, so they don't believe it is sin.

This doesn't have the joyous meaning that it might have to those who first heard it, might have had. Let's put it like this. Suppose that a man came down here in uniform and respectfully asked permission to speak a word. And he had the credentials of the government, and he arose and said, I am asked by the government to make the announcement that you are free. That you will not any longer be restrained by the government. You can vote as you please, go to church as you please, do as you please, work where you please. I am set to tell you that you are now free. We would look at each other and thank him courteously and wonder what had happened to him, whether he was real or not.

My friends, that's because you've enjoyed freedom from the time you can remember. That's because you have the freedom to criticize the very government that's given you that freedom. The very country that has made you free, you are free to condemn. And so therefore, it can't hit you. It couldn't hit you as it would, say, in Budapest. Imagine now, in Budapest. Suppose that in some church there somebody were to arise and make such an announcement. Why there'd be an explosion that would rattle the windows. There would be tears of joy. They would turn and hug

each other and cry and perhaps break into their national anthem. And thank God for that freedom which we have enjoyed ungratefully so long.

Now it's exactly the same here. When we who have known about forgiveness so long and have heard of the grace of God preached about so much that it doesn't reach us as it did, and must have, these early persons who first heard it. Be it known unto you therefore men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And by Him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Men and women who had born the long yoke and had worn their phylacteries and had performed everything told them by the rabbi's. Now, they hear the joyous news that they can be forgiven through Jesus Christ so that all things which they could not be delivered from by the law of Moses, they are now freed from by this Man whom God hath made both Lord and Christ. Is it any wonder that that early church was a joyous church? Is it any wonder that there was an up springing of emotion that they could hardly contain.

Now, I know also that it was the presence of the Holy Spirit that made them joyful. But I believe that even that kind of joy can be psychologically analyzed, at least, in a measure. And so, the contrast, the wondrous contrast between the great heavy yoke that couldn't do anything but make their neck sore and their hearts heavy was now tossed away, and the good news of Christ, the message that God was ready to forgive; a message that no pronouncement of science can equal. The most valuable message probably that this sin-ruined world can ever know. That's what the Bible means by the gospel. That's what it means. That's the message of the gospel. And all the Bible adds up to this. And there certainly is much more, but this is basic.

Now, you say, how is this applied, and what can we do about it, and how do I make it real to me? Well, the Bible has been very, very explicit here, very explicit. First John 1:9. You know what it says. If we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

I think that this is one of the most wonderful, and yet the most awful verses in the entire Bible. And I have never heard it really talked about. I have not even myself, though I have this conviction about it, have never said enough about it. If we confess our sins, He is merciful and gracious to forgive. If it said that, I would understand it. If it said that, I would say, well, that's true, and that's in line with the rest of the teaching of the Bible, because God is merciful and gracious, and therefore, when we confess, He mercifully and graciously forgives. But it doesn't say that.

If it had said, If we confess our sins, God in His pity, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness, I would say that accords with the rest of the teaching of the Bible about the great pity which God has for suffering men. But he doesn't say either, merciful, pitiful, gracious, kind. It

doesn't use any of those words. It says faithful and just did you ever think of that? Did you ever stop to wonder why those words faithful and just start there? If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just.

Now why when it looks to me as if faithfulness and justice would mean just the opposite. It would mean that we should be punished without mercy from the presence of God forever. A just and holy God could not receive sinners into heaven. No man can see God who is unholy. And the soul that sinneth it shall die. And all the nations that forget God shall be cast into hell. That's the justice of God. That's the faithfulness and justice of God. And it looks as if it should have said that the faithfulness and justice of God will refuse to forgive sin and will drive us from His presence forever.

But why did it say faithful and just to forgive? It is because one of our own race, one of our own people, Who was once held in the arms, as this little girl was held this morning, by an old man and prayed over. One of our race, who once walked on baby legs and grew long legged and bony and awkward when He was 12 or 13, and then grew on to a fine, symmetrical manhood, and grew in wisdom and in favor with God and men.

There was One of our race, completely responsible for us, and taking upon Himself all our iniquities. And He went and, in the darkness, did something which now places forgiveness of sin out of the hands of mere mercy, as we might say, and makes it a necessary thing for God to do. Jesus Christ, by His atonement made a covenant so that, God, to be just, has to forgive when sins have been confessed. God, to be faithful, has to forgive when sins have been confessed. I say this is one of the most astonishing texts in the entire Bible, that God forgives sin justly and faithfully. Why justly and faithfully? Because there sits at His right hand, One who went through the unspeakable hard agony on the cross, and in darkness, fixed things so God could not only show mercy, but even justice is on the side of the returning sinner. Even justice is on the side of the man who comes to God. Even God's faithfulness is on our side.

If there had been no darkness, no cry in the night, no wound in the side, no nails in the hands. There never could have been anything for you and me and justice and faithfulness except damnation. But because the cry was heard in the night, Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit. And because the sun refused to shine, and because a Man went in there into the darkness, and gave His all for people that hated him, and were his enemies. Now, God has it turned around so that God must forgive sin. He can't do anything else, but that.

So, if you will confess your sin, we have covenant on our side, and we have justice then on our side. Isn't it wonderful, my friends? I don't often say that in sermons, isn't it wonderful? I know that's a rather cheap way to put it. But don't you see the deep value and wonder of all this? That because there is an atonement made through this Man, through this Man, said the apostle: Be it known

unto you therefore men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you forgiveness of sins. And by Him all that believe are justified.

And now justice is even on our side, not mercy, not only mercy, but also justice. And the faithful God can fulfill the text of the Old Testament that says: Thou God, art a God who forgives iniquity and sin. To me, that's worth taking everywhere throughout the whole world. People often wonder why I don't deal in baptism, and they write and ask me whether I believe in the pre-tribulation, or post-tribulation rapture. And they write and ask me what I think of this man or that man as though I wanted to tell them. And people are always wanting to get out on a limb, and I do it myself sometimes.

But brethren, at the beating heart of our message and of our Christian Fellowship is this. That the terrible calamity hit us, and not only did it hit us, but we brought it by our own sin. And we have no excuse in the wide world to offer. We did it, as David said, it's our fault. We did it. And yet God in His great mercy has sent a Man. And that Man being God and man, has fixed it now so even justice is on our side.

So, I want to close by saying this to you friends. Don't think of God being divided up in His attitude toward you. Never think of God's mercy being for you and His kindness being for you and His pity being for you. And then His justice and His faithfulness and His Holiness being against you. Never think of it that way. It used to be maybe that way before the atonement was made. But it's that way no more. All of God is for you. And all the attributes of God are over on your side. And everything God is, is yours. And there isn't an attribute or a characteristic of the Holy God but is over on your side, because Jesus died and rose and lives and pleads. Now there's the simple gospel. And yet it has been the throbbing heart of the gospel message during all these long years. So tell it friends, and keep telling it and tell it to everybody and tell it abroad.

Roy, go back and tell it. I know you will. And we Christians paid and prayed to help them to go and tell it, this wonderful message. To us, who are so used to things, I say, we have sort of lost the beauty of it. But, oh, to those that know it for the first time, how wonderful, how wonderful it must be. How wonderful.

Now, I think that tonight, I have reason to believe, tonight, will be one of the greatest meetings we've ever had in this church. And I want you to be here tonight.

We thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst not overlook us rebels, here in a dark, forlorn world. But Thou didst send us Thyself, Thy Son. We thank thee for the fountain which is opened in the house of David and is now open for all of us. We pray, that we may not through morbid humility or fear or self-hatred, fail to enter and be washed, but that we might

enter, and be clean. And now, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion and fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, forever. Amen.