

## THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Bible is the story of God's love for mankind and the center of that story is Jesus Christ through whom he showed us that love. The promise of Jesus, the prophecies of his life and work throughout the *Old Testament*, his birth in Bethlehem, his teaching and ministry among the people of Judea and Galilee, his death on the cross, his resurrection on the third day, his ascension into heaven and the promise of his return—these are the sum and substance of the Scriptures and the driving force behind all human history.

Yahweh, the God of Israel, had foretold the coming of Jesus through the prophets of Israel for over fifteen hundred years. Through Moses he told how he had promised Adam and Eve He would raise up a descendent of Eve's Who would crush the head of the serpent who has led the world astray ever since the Garden of Eden.

Through the lips of unwilling Balaam He told the Israelites how He would raise up a ruler, a star out of Jacob, who would conquer the enemies of His people. (*Numbers 24:15-19*) In *Psalms 32* He described how the Messiah would crush the head of Satan by taking away the power of his only weapon, which was sin. "*Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him....*" (*Psalms 32:1-2*)

God would render sin powerless by forgiving it! But how could a just God forgive sins and still be just? Were not the wages of sin death? Was not death required as the just payment for sins committed? God had said to Adam: "*On the day you eat of it you will surely die.*" (*Genesis 2:17*) And God cannot lie.

Yes, death was required as the just wages for sin. And that is why from the time of Moses, God made it clear to the Israelites that *a blood sacrifice was required for their sins to be forgiven.*

But God also made it clear that just as He Himself would provide the blood sacrifices for Israel, one day he would provide the ultimate and perfect blood sacrifice in the form of a Savior who would die for the sins of mankind and by so doing, pay the penalty all for their sins. He gave them signs which foretold this future sacrifice—a ram to replace Isaac, who lay bound under Abraham's knife on the altar at Mount Moriah. A passover lamb in Egypt so that the Israelites could smear its blood on the doorposts of their homes to ward off the angel of death as he passed through the land taking the lives of all the firstborn. A lamb each year for the celebration of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, so that the sins of Israel would be forgiven. These were not only *sacrificial* lambs, they were *sacramental lambs*, a means of grace through which God's love and forgiveness could flow to His children.

As time went by, and God revealed more and more of His plan through the prophets, the promised Messiah began to take form as the perfect fulfillment of the sacrifices that lay at the heart of Israel's worship. The Messiah would be the true and eternal Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.

Job, a Gentile who was reduced to the most primitive possible faith—the fear of God—by being stripped of every other resource he had, saw his Messiah in yet another light: he saw him as an advocate, a friend in heaven who interceded for him at the throne of God. The *Book of Job* records how Job called out in hope: “O earth, do not cover my blood; may my cry never be laid to rest! Even now my witness is in heaven; my advocate is on high. My intercessor is my friend as my eyes pour out tears to God; on behalf of a man he pleads with God as a man pleads for his friend.” (Job 16:18-21) As the blood of Abel cried out from the ground for justice upon Cain, Job’s blood cried out to his advocate, his heavenly friend to make intercession for him with God. And God rewarded Job’s faith by revealing to him that his Messiah would stand upon the earth long after Job had passed away and declare Him alive and righteous before God and man. Job expresses his faith in God’s promise in some of the most famous words in the *Old Testament*: “I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—and not as a stranger.” (Job 19:25-27)

And so, over the centuries, the Messiah took shape through the oracles of Israel’s prophets. First a warrior who would crush the head of Satan; then a blood sacrifice who would pay the price for the sins of Israel; then an advocate and redeemer who would intercede for mankind’s sins at the throne of God, then a suffering servant who would “...bear the sins of many and make intercession for the transgressors.” (Isaiah 53:12) But yet another aspect of Messiah was expressed in the words of one of Israel’s greatest and most beleaguered prophets: Jeremiah. “In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.” [Jeremiah 33:15-16) These have to be the sweetest, the most precious words Jeremiah heard in his life! Since man had no righteousness of his own, God would one day make available to him a righteousness that came from above, a powerful righteousness that would completely wash away Father Adam’s sin and make him pure and clean in God’s sight!

And six hundred years after Jeremiah uttered his prophecy, God fulfilled it in a way that no one expected. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, who arrived in the form of a tiny baby, the seed of Eve, begotten by the Holy Spirit of God in a young virgin in the town of Nazareth in Galilee. He was the only innocent child ever born, an infant who gives us all the knowledge and the hope we will ever need, because He ***IS*** Our Righteousness! All we need do is cling to this Holy Infant, and we will possess all the righteousness we will ever need.

If you know you need him, you have already accepted Him, because we receive our redemption the moment we know we need a Redeemer. We just have to get over the pride that percolates in us and makes us want to become our own saviors by continually aspiring to perfection through self-correction or self-discipline or self-improvement or self-fulfillment or self-esteem or self-actualization or whatever other new “self” cures are out there. As long as we aspire to a righteousness of our own, we are trying to make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear. But when we turn to God in repentance and trust, He gives it to us on a silver platter.

The Lord, Our Righteousness. How many people have longed for a righteousness they could call their own? How often have you and I tasted the bitter potion of guilt and lived through endless days and nights lamenting: *“If only I had done this...if only I hadn’t done that...”* Surely the greatest torture a person can experience is the anguish of a guilty conscience. *“If only I hadn’t spoken those words of anger that drove my child away from me.” “If only I hadn’t insisted on extracting that pound of flesh from the one I love when she wounded me. If only I had just forgiven my friend and been done with it.” “If only I had made the first move to reconcile. But now too late...too late....”*

Guilt can poison a person and make them shrivel up inside and die. Ever since the sin of Adam fell upon us all and turned us into thorn-bearing trees instead of fruit-bearing trees, we have lived with the cancer of sin and guilt inside us, eating us alive, and leading us toward death. We try to mask its pain by pointing at others whose cancer is at a more advanced stage and crying *“Worse than me! Worse than me!”* But it doesn’t really help, because when we are lying awake in our beds in the middle of the night, cherishing thoughts of anger or lust or jealousy or revenge, or worrying once again that God will not come to our aid, we know that we are guilty as charged. We may be able to fool the world—maybe even the one sleeping beside us—but we can’t fool ourselves.

We are guilty as hell.

We need a champion, an intercessor, an advocate. We need a righteousness we can call our own to replace the guilt that is killing us. We need a Savior.

And the good news I have for you today is that we **have** a Savior! He is the Lion of Judah who has crushed the head of our adversary. He is the Lamb of God who has shed his blood as an effective sacrifice for all our sins. He is our heavenly Advocate, our High Priest, who intercedes for us at the throne of God. He is the Son of God who has offered us His perfect righteousness in exchange for all our guilt. He is Jesus Christ, Messiah, and He has washed away our sins and set us free.

And that is His gift to you and to me: the forgiveness of our sins, peace with God, and the privilege of proclaiming His salvation to a world full of lost souls who are dying of guilt and starving for grace.

The Lord, our Righteousness. Amen.

### **Jeremiah 33:14-16**

<sup>14</sup> “‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.

<sup>15</sup> “‘In those days and at that time  
I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line;  
he will do what is just and right in the land.

<sup>16</sup> In those days Judah will be saved  
and Jerusalem will live in safety.

This is the name by which it will be called:

The LORD Our Righteous Savior.’

## **Romans 3:19-26**

<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

### **Righteousness Through Faith**

<sup>21</sup> But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— <sup>26</sup> he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

## **Matthew 5:17-20**

### **The Fulfillment of the Law**

<sup>17</sup> “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.