

GOD'S EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

"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" (Acts 13:38-39).

Sin is not a popular word today. People talk about complexes, inhibitions, repressions, and rationalization. These are nice, long, technical words, but it is better to spell them quite simply, just SIN. Sin is anything that comes between God and an individual, breaking or preventing fellowship. It is also anything that comes between individuals, breaking or preventing fellowship. Sin may be either failing to do what one knows to be God's will, or refusing to do it. That is to say, one can destroy life, either by starving or by poisoning. Either would be effective. Sin may be just omitting to do God's will. In the gospel story of the marriage feast, that man was not expelled from the feast because of anything he had done, but for the fact that he had omitted to put on a wedding garment. You will also recall that the barren fig tree was cursed, not because it had a great number of leaves on it, but because it did not bear fruit.

Some people would have us to believe that sin no longer exists. On this subject God's Word has this to say: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). For this reason all need forgiveness. But, until one has the consciousness of sin, he will never realize his need of forgiveness. There is a woeful lack of the sense of sin today.

Dr. Alexander Whyte once told his very aristocratic congregation in Edinburgh that they had every virtue, except the sense of sin. However, the sense of sin is keenest in the purest and most Christlike people. It is the most holy who feel most acutely the need of forgiveness. A hot cinder, if it is put on the thick part of your heel, may not hurt as much as if it were placed on your cheek, but the temperature of the cinder would be the same: only your sensitiveness to it would be changed. As we look into our own hearts we see opportunities missed, duties neglected, and the good which we have tried to do tainted with selfishness.

There are sins of omission and commission; sins of night and of day; sins of youth, manhood, and womanhood. All sins of both public and private life are against the living God. We know that we have come far short of all that we ought to be. We are haunted by the memory of things done which we ought not to have done, and things left undone which we should have done. We are a prey to selfishness, worry, fear, anger, jealousy, and pride. Through the Apostle John our Lord has reminded us that "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves." The reality of sin emphasizes the need of forgiveness.

I. The Subjects of This Proclamation.

"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" (Acts 13:38-39).

Who are the subjects of God's grace and mercy? Who are the subjects of His offer of salvation? For whom did Christ die on the cross? The Word of God gives us a specific answer to these questions. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish

but have everlasting life." "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:2).

If language means anything, if the Bible has any message for us, it is the truth that the subjects of this emancipation proclamation are all sinners, or all who need forgiveness of sins, and to that need there is no exception among the souls of mankind.

II. The Source Of This Proclamation.

What is the source of this salvation? Is it the preacher? Of course not. Is it the church? Definitely not. Is it Christians? No. The source of this proclamation is the love, the mercy, the compassion, and the grace of God. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son." "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; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour" (Titus 3:5-6).

The source of this proclamation is God, the God Who created you, the God Who is preserving you, the God against Whom you have sinned, the God Who loves you, the God Who wants you to be saved, and Who alone can and will save you. The source of salvation is not an ordinance, a church, or a denomination. It is solely and entirely through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Word is plain: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins."

Being a sinner, and because I am surrounded by people who, like myself, are sinners, I must needs either believe in the possibility of the forgiveness of sins, or else resign myself to despair, and abandon all hope for the human race at large. Unless sin can be forgiven, we need not look to God for acceptance. It is not through you or any other human being. Only through the Son of God can this blessing come to you. Look not to yourself, or to any other sinner, for the blessing of salvation. Look to Christ only for it, for through Him alone "is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." It is entirely on account of Who He is and what He has done that this great pardon is preached unto you.

III. The Substance Of This Proclamation.

What is the substance of this proclamation? What does it offer us? What does it carry with it? Into what does it lead us? What do we receive by accepting it? Let us go back to the text and read it again: "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."

"Be it known unto you" is God's announcement. This proclamation is something to be known by us because God has declared it. What is to be known? "That through this man," that is, through Christ, the blessing of forgiveness is available. No other person is great enough to obtain this blessing of forgiveness or salvation and give it to us.

No words can express this fact too strongly. Through Him this blessing comes, and Him alone. It does not come by works which we have done or may do. It is not through the shedding of bitter tears. It is not by earnest prayers which we

have uttered. It is not through agonizing feelings which we have known. It is not through penances performed. It is not obtained by submitting to baptism, or in partaking of the Lord's Supper. It is not by any or all of these, but "by him all that believe are justified from all things." In Christ alone "we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace."

The One Who deals with the past, and reconciles us to God, deals with the future too. It is a great thing to be delivered from a guilty past. But that is not enough. We have a life to live now, and we have a future to face. As Toplady's familiar hymn expressed it: "Be of sin the double cure, Save from wrath and make me pure." That is exactly what the Lord does for you and me. He does not just wipe out the guilty past, give us a new start, and then leave us to struggle on as best we can. He imparts the strength to us to conquer our besetting sins, and to be what we ought to be. To the sinful woman, whom He saved, Christ said: "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more."

Was ever the message of the forgiveness of sins more needed than it is today? The world is almost in despair about itself, about human nature, and about the future. Somehow the world has gone wrong; people have made a sorry mess of things. But, thank God, that is not all there is to be said. There is the gospel of forgiveness to be proclaimed. And there is hope for a despairing world. As Paul said, "But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Romans 5:20). Mankind is not doomed to be haunted forever by an evil past from which it cannot escape. Man is a sinner, but by the grace of God he can become a saint.

IV. The Simplicity Of This Proclamation.

The terms or conditions are so clear, so definite, and so simple. In order to press upon your heart the clear and free offer of salvation, God repeats again and again the way of salvation. Adequate provision has been made for your need by the Lord Jesus Christ. This divine forgiveness is made available to you "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

The forgiveness of sins is vitally connected with the atonement of Christ. Through the atoning work of the Saviour, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." If you have difficulty in believing the mystery of the atonement, let me urge you never to give up the fact of it because you do not understand some theory of man about it. Mr. Balfour once made a helpful remark about the atonement. He said: "If it were not too vast for our intellectual comprehension, it would be too narrow for our spiritual need." That is a sublime statement indeed. Christ "bore our sins in his own body on the tree." There He took our place and died in our stead, "the just for the unjust," that He might bring us to God. He suffered the curse for us. Men know the forgiveness of sins when they rest in the finished work of Christ. He blots out their iniquities.

Christ offered Himself as a vicarious sacrifice for sinners, and has thereby reconciled us by the blood of His cross and given us pardon, peace, protection, provision, and power.

"Upon a life I do not live,
Upon a death I did not die
On another's life, another's death
I stake my whole eternity."

Christ's atonement is the sole ground of pardon. God forgives us on account of what Christ has done for us. The atonement of Christ is the only sufficient reason for God's forgiving the guilty.

"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 (that is the condition) are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." "All that believe." These are the right people. They take their place as guilty sinners before God, acknowledging that they do not have any goodness, or merit, or title at all, and simply believe the good news which God sends them concerning His Son. Are you among these who do this? Or, do you say, "But my faith is so weak?" Well, that is not a big matter if your faith is in the right Person. He is not small. He is great enough to save you, great enough to bless you, and great enough for God's glory. Someone said to an aged woman who enjoyed perfect peace, "Oh, but you are a woman of such great faith!" "No," she responded, "I am a woman of little faith, but I have a great Saviour." It is not the amount of faith that I have, but the Person in Whom I believe, which is important. The right people are those who believe in the right Person, and "by him all that believe are justified from all things".

"By him all that believe are justified from all things." They are justified now, and they are privileged to know it on the authority of the Word of God. What is it to be justified? It is to be accounted righteous by God. He reckons every believer in Christ clear of every charge in His sight, and He is just in doing this, because all the righteous claims of His throne have found their full answer at the cross. Nothing remains to be settled, for everything has been fully and eternally settled at the cross.

Justification by faith is the very heart of this message. Salvation is the complete forgiveness of all sin. There are no limits to its benefits. It is the greatest benefit that God can bestow upon sinful man. This justification is from the sins of the past, the present, and the future.

If you will be one to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour, you will then and there be justified from all things and be set free to serve God until the Lord calls you to meet Him and to be with Him forever.