

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. They are nice, long technical words, but it is better to spell them quite simply, just s-i-n. Sin is anything that comes between God and me, breaking our fellowship. Or, it is anything that comes between somebody else and me, breaking fellowship. Sin may be either failing to do what one knows to be God's will, or refusing to do it. Sin may be simply omitting to do God's will. In the gospel story of the marriage feast, that man was expelled from the feast, not for anything he had done, but just because he had failed to put on the wedding garment. 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 says, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Therefore, all share in the need of forgiveness.

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 the members of 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 most Christlike people. It is the most holy who feel most acutely their unworthiness and their need of forgiveness. There are various verses in the Psalms blotted with the tears of the saints and broken with their sobs. It was Isaiah who cried, "Woe is me, for I am undone." At the end of his long life of devotion to Christ, John said, "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves." As we look into our own hearts we see opportunities missed, duties neglected and the good which we have tried to do smeared with selfishness.

From our text we learn four things about God's Emancipation Proclamation:

I. Its Subjects.

"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 the Lord Jesus Christ die on Calvary's cross? Let the Word of God answer. "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" (John 3:16). "And 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). The subjects of this emancipation proclamation are men, women, boys and girls of every color, condition and clime—all who need the forgiveness of sins, and to that there is no exception among the souls of men. God commands His children to proclaim to sinners everywhere the glorious gospel of the forgiveness of sin.

II. Its Source.

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. "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 others who, like myself, are sinners, I must needs either believe in 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.

III. Its Substance.

What is the substance of this proclamation? What does it offer? What does it carry with it? What do people receive when they accept 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" (Acts 13:38-39).

"Be it known unto you" is God's announcement. This proclamation is something to be known, not something to be felt or experienced, but 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 long penances which people perform. It is not obtained by baptism or 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."

IV. Its Simplicity.

Its 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. Adequate provision has been made by Christ Jesus to meet your need. This divine forgiveness is available "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." He "made peace through the blood of His cross."

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 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 my place and died in my stead, "the just for the unjust." He suffered the curse for me. Men do know the forgiveness of sins when they rest in the finished work of the crucified Christ. He blots out their iniquities. It is wholly on account of who He is and what He has done that salvation is experienced by you.

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 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" take their place as guilty sinners before God, owning that they have no goodness, or merit, or title at all. Are you among those who believe on Christ? Do you say, "But my faith is so weak?" Well, that is not the important thing; rather, it is a matter of your faith being in the right person. 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, but the person in whom you believe, that is so important.

"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.