

THE LORD IS OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Bible is the story of God's love for mankind and the center of that story is Jesus Christ.

The account of Jesus' life and work begins in the prophecies of the *Old Testament* and continues with 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 His promise to return.

This story is the sum and substance of the Scriptures and the driving force behind all human history.

The first prophecy of Jesus was given through Moses who recorded that God promised Adam and Eve that He would raise up a descendent of Eve's Who would crush the head of Satan—the source of all evil.

Through the lips of unwilling Balaam He told the Israelites that 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 he would not count men's sins against them.

"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose

sin the Lord does not count against him....” (Psalm 32:1-2)

God would render sin powerless by forgiving it!

But how could God forgive sins when He had promised Adam that on the day he sinned he would surely die.” (*Genesis 2:17*)

According to God’s own word, sin must be punished by death.

So how could God allow sinners to live, yet not break His word?

God’s answer to this conundrum is called “the Gospel.”

Since sin must be punished by death, God would provide a substitute to die in the sinner’s place and atone for his sins.

In other words God would provide a **scapegoat**.

For ancient Israel, this scapegoat took the form of a lamb or goat.

God called it a “blood sacrifice” and it served as the animating principle of Israel’s worship.

And just as God provided the blood sacrifices for Israel, one day he would provide a perfect blood sacrifice in the form of a Savior who would die to atone for the sins of all mankind.

Throughout the Old Testament era God gave the Israelites examples of this future blood sacrifice.

When Isaac lay bound under Abraham's knife on Mount Moriah, God provided a ram as a blood sacrifice to save Isaac's life.

When all the firstborn of Egypt were under the curse of the angel of death. God provided the blood sacrifice lambs to ward off the angel as he passed over the homes of the Israelites.

Each year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, God provided a goat to serve as a scapegoat upon whom the unconfessed sins of Israel would be placed and who would be led out into the wilderness to die.

Isaiah describes the future blood sacrifice, the Savior to come as "a suffering servant of Yahweh," who would be "pierced for our sins" and "bear our iniquities."

So as time went by the future Savior began to take form as the perfect fulfillment of the sacrifices that lay at the heart of Israel's worship.

The Savior would be the true and eternal Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.

And when the time arrived, God Himself took on flesh and blood to become the suffering servant, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Then He proclaimed that all one had to do to receive the benefits of this blood sacrifice was to believe and trust that it counted for him—that the Divine Scapegoat had paid the penalty for all his sins.

This was called “faith” and during the Old Testament era God had raised up one man who was a paragon of this faith.

His name was Job and he was a Gentile had been reduced to horrendous suffering by Satan.

Yet he had held on to the simplest form of faith—the fear of God.

Even in his agony Job could still discern the figure of an advocate in heaven—a friend who would intercede for him at the throne of God.

The *Book of Job* records how Job cried out in his faith: “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 to God, Job 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 long after he had passed away his Savior would come to earth 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 it is that over the centuries Messiah took shape through the oracles of Israel’s prophets.

First, he would be a warrior who would crush the head of Satan.

Then he would be a blood sacrifice who would pay the price for the sins of Israel.

Then he would be then a heavenly advocate who would intercede for a man's sins before the throne of God.

Then he would be a suffering servant who would *"...bear the sins of many and make intercession for their transgressors."* (Isaiah 53:12)

But then another aspect of this Savior 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 must have been 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 this prophecy, God fulfilled it in a way that no one expected.

He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, 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.

Jesus **IS** Our Righteousness!

We need to do nothing other than cling to Him and He will supply 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 “self” cures there are out there.

As long as we aspire to have 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 IS 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 bushes instead of fruit-bearing trees, we have lived with the cancer of sin and guilt eating us alive and leading us to 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 help, because when we are lying awake in our beds in the middle of the night, wallowing in thoughts of anger or lust or jealousy or revenge and doubting 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 that can replace the guilt that is killing us.

We need a Savior.

And the good news I have for you today is that we **have** that Savior!

He is the Lion of Judah who has crushed the head of our adversary, the serpent.

He is the Lamb of God who was the blood sacrifice for all of our sins.

He is 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 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 IS our Righteousness.

Amen.

