



## 15 Words of Hope

### 2 Corinthians 5:21

The verse that we're going to look at is 2 Corinthians 5:21, 2 Corinthians 5:21. It says this, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

The Bible makes it clear, first of all, that all people are sinners by nature and by action. In fact, all people are sinners from birth. And thus all people are born alienated from God who is holy, cannot look upon sin, cannot fellowship with sinners. That alienation because of sin prevents us from knowing God. He is too perfectly holy to have anything to do with sinners, except to reject them.

Now the result of that rejection, the result of that alienation in time is Godlessness. The result of it in eternity is hell. So this alienation in to which every human being is born is indeed a serious issue. It means that everybody lives their life without God and if they die in that condition, will spend their eternity without God in torment.

Now that kind of reality proves that the most deadly virus in the world is not the HIV virus, it is the SIN virus. Like the HIV virus, it kills everyone it infects, only unlike the HIV virus it infects everyone. It kills not just in time but in eternity, it kills not just physically but spiritually. There is no cure for the HIV virus, but thankfully there is a cure for the SIN virus. In fact, God has made it possible for sinners to be cured so thoroughly and completely that they can be reconciled to God and have eternal fellowship in His presence.

And that is the good news, that is what Christianity preaches, that's the gospel. There is a cure for the SIN virus so that the hostility between people and God can end now and forever and sinners can be reconciled to holy God. In fact, if you look back at verses 18, 19 and 20 you see several times the word "reconciled" in one form or another. Verse 18 says, "God who reconciled us to Himself." Verse 19, "That God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." And at the end of verse 20 we call on sinners to be reconciled to God.

This is the good news, friends. This is the great news that you don't have to live godlessly in time and you don't have to live godlessly in eternity. You don't need to suffer through this life without God and to suffer eternal torment without God in the life to come. Reconciliation is possible.

But that brings up the question...How? The Apostle Paul has been talking about the ministry of reconciliation. We have been reconciled to God and now we preach reconciliation. He mentions the ministry or reconciliation in verses 18 and 19 and then in verse 20 he mentions it by saying,

"We are ambassadors for Christ, we go out and we preach to sinners that they can be reconciled to God." That's our ministry. That is the good news.

But the question then comes up...how can that be? How can such a reconciliation take place? How can an absolutely and utterly holy God who is infinitely pure and perfect ever be reconciled to sinners? How can He do that who is too pure to look on sin or to fellowship with transgressors? How can God satisfy His just and holy law with a condemnation of sinners by full and deserved punishment and still show them mercy who deserve no mercy? How can God end the hostility and how can He take sinners into His holy heaven to live with Him forever in intimate communion? How? How can both justice and grace be satisfied? How can love toward sinners and righteousness come together? To put it in Paul's words, how can God be just and a justifier of sinners?

The one verse I just read you explains how. Fifteen Greek words and these 15 Greek words translated into English carefully define and perfectly balance the mystery of reconciliation. They show us the essence of the atonement. In fact, in the one verse that I read you is the heart of the good news. In that one verse is the most powerful truth in Scripture because it embraces and explains how sinners can be reconciled to God. Here is where the paradox of redemption is resolved. Here is where the mystery is solved. Here is where the riddle is answered. Here is where we find how holy justice and perfect love can both be satisfied, how righteousness and mercy can embrace each other. And the truth of this one brief sentence solves the most profound dilemma of how God can reconcile with sinners.

Well needless to say, having said that you are aware that there's a lot in this verse. We have to search carefully through this cache of rare jewels and stop to examine each one of them with a magnifying glass in order to understand the richness.

Now as we look at this verse together I want to point your attention to four elements, four features of the text that unfolded significance...the benefactor, the substitute, the beneficiaries and the benefits. That really sums up how God can reconcile sinners.

Let's start at the beginning, the benefactor. The verse begins, "He made..." stop there. Now if you're a Bible student the first question you're going to ask is to whom does "He" refer? The answer comes quickly, look one word back at the end of verse 20...God. God is the antecedent. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf. The point is it's God's plan, He's the benefactor. God is behind the whole reconciliation plan. He designed it. He worked it out. He brings it to fruition. It is His plan. This is a very crucial perspective and you'll see why as I comment on it. There could be no reconciliation unless God initiated it. There could be no reconciliation unless God activated it. There could be no reconciliation unless God applied it. He had to design it and He has to execute it. It cannot come from any human source. Nothing man could do, nothing man could not do could produce reconciliation with God. It isn't anything we do or don't do. In fact all of our efforts in the religious realm amount to filthy rags, the Bible says. The world is literally filled with religion and all of that religion apart from Christianity is man producing a plan with the aid of Satan in which he can initiate reconciliation with God. That is the fatal flaw of all world religions no matter what name they come under.

Romans chapter 3 says, verse 10, "There is none that does good, there is none righteous, no not one, there is none that understands, there is none that seeks after God." Nobody, absolutely nobody. Now you would think if there was anyone who could have devised the plan most aptly and pull it off it would have been the Jews, since after all, the Jews were the people of the true God, Yahweh, Jehovah. And God gave to them the law and the prophets and the covenants and the adoption and all of the things that Romans 9 mention. They had the revelation. They had the

Old Testament and to them even salvation was given...salvation is of the Jews, of them and to them came the Messiah. If anyone could have devised a system by which they could have achieved reconciliation, it would have been the Jews. But they failed. And in Romans chapter 10 Paul comments on the failure by saying, "My heart's desire and prayer to God is for Israel for their salvation," they have not achieved it, they haven't achieved reconciliation with all their religiosity, with all that they received by way of divine revelation from God because they believed that somehow this reconciliation depended on them and therefore they're not saved, I bear them witness Paul says in verse 2, they have a zeal for God but not according to knowledge so not knowing about God's righteousness they seek to establish their own. That's what false religion is, in a word, it's the religion of human achievement.

But they never can accomplish it because the only way that reconciliation could ever occur is if God reached out to sinners. And He did. It was God who made Him who knew no sin to be sin. It was God's plan. He designed it. He initiated it. And He executed it. So that Jesus went to the cross not because men turned on Him, though they did, Jesus went to the cross not because seducing spirits orchestrated the minds of the religious leaders of Judaism to plot His death, though they did. Jesus went to the cross not because an angry mob screamed for His blood, though they did. Jesus went to the cross because God planned it. God purposed it. And God designed it as the absolutely necessary means by which and by which alone reconciliation could take place. That's why Jesus said, "I came into the world to do the Father's will." That's why in John 18:11 He said, "Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given Me?" meaning the cup of wrath. That's why in Hebrews chapter 10 the Lord Jesus is quoted as saying, "A body Thou hast prepared Me and I have come to do Thy will, O God." That's why in Acts chapter 2 when Peter stood up on the day of Pentecost and preached to the population of Jerusalem, many of whom had been screaming for the blood of Jesus and been guilty of calling for His execution, Peter says to that crowd, "You have killed the Son of God by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." In other words, you did your evil deed but it was all in the plan of the Father.

Only God could call the second member of the trinity to become incarnate and come into the world and humble Himself and take on the form of a man and be obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, only God could ask that of Him. Only God could design an atonement for sin that would satisfy His justice because only God knows what it takes to satisfy His justice. Only God knows what propitiates His wrath. We don't know. Only God could decide how His own infinite holiness, intense hatred of sin and inflexible justice could be perfectly satisfied without destroying the sinner in that satisfaction. Only God could know what it would take to make a sinner acceptable to Him so that that sinner could escape eternal hell and live in the very presence of God in His own house. Only God could determine how the spiritual nature and the supreme authority and the unchangeable perfection of His law which is holy, just and good could be completely satisfied and the lawbreaker completely justified and rightly and purely forgiven and accepted, though fallen, guilty and depraved.

Only God could bring all of those components to reconciliation. Only God knew what it would take. Only God knew how to solve the dilemma. Only He knew what would satisfy His righteous requirement. Only He knew how He could spend His wrath so that wrath was consummated. Only He knew what it took to bear the burden of sin, to endure the punishment of His fury, only He knew. And so while the world may call the gospel and the work of Jesus Christ foolish, foolishness, it is to those who believe the wisdom of God, is it not? It may seem foolish to the world but it is the purest and profoundest wisdom that the infinitely holy God could devise a plan consistent with His infinite holiness to reconcile utterly wicked

sinners...only God. So God is the benefactor. God is the benefactor. He is the one who made the plan, He is the one who must execute the plan.

That is so important, beloved, absolutely important. It all flows out of this great reality...God so loved the world...right? That He gave. And that is exactly what Paul says in different terms in Romans chapter 5 verse 8, "God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died in our place." It all came out of God's love. While we were enemies, verse 10 says, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son. And God initiated it because He loved us. God, Ephesians 2:4 says, who is rich in mercy for the great love wherewith He had loved us has granted us salvation. God loves sinners. That's why in Colossians chapter 1 the Apostle Paul says, "Thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light." Only God knew what the qualifications were. Only God could qualify us. He was the only one who could know the standard. And thanks to Him, for He delivered us from the domain of darkness. He transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

That is exactly why the Apostle Paul in Ephesians chapter 1 says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ." It was the Father who chose us in Him before the foundation of the world. It was the Father who predestined us to the adoption as sons through Jesus Christ. Everything is through the praise of His glory. It is He who freely bestowed on us salvation in the beloved, who gave us redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, etc., etc. It was the Father who designed to lavish on us all wisdom and insight and all riches of grace.

Listen, this is very different in the religions of the world. The religions of the world basically operate on a premise of fear that God is an angry, hateful, or indifferent God who could really care less about the prosperity of beings who grubble around underneath Him in this world. And so the goal of most all religions is to somehow to appease an otherwise hostile and angry God. Somehow they have to devise a system if they're going to be reconciled to God so that He doesn't crush out their life and punish them eternally. They're going to have to appease this God. And so they are busily inventing systems of appeasement by which through certain religious ceremonies or through certain religious duties and actions, or certain good works they can somehow appease this deity and somehow hold back His deadly fury.

On the other hand, Christianity proclaims a God who loves, who loves so much He is a Savior, God our Savior who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. We have a God who doesn't hate but a God who loves sinners and has Himself designed a way for them to have fellowship with Him forever and ever. We don't have to appease God. God loves the sinner and God in His love provides the sacrifice and wonderfully and graciously and freely and magnanimously and eagerly offers the gift of forgiveness. This is the good news. The good news is you don't have to appease God. The good news is you don't have to figure out a plan of reconciliation. The good news is you don't have to somehow work out your own righteousness. The good news is God is the benefactor. He knows what satisfies His righteousness and His holiness. He has effected that satisfaction. The price of sin has been paid and He now offers you forgiveness and reconciliation, that's the gospel.

Now what did it take? It took death because as it says in the Old Testament in Ezekiel 18:20, the person who sins will die. As it says in Romans 6:23 in the New Testament, "The wages of sin is death." God knew what the requirement was...the requirement is death. And God may that abundantly clear throughout the whole Old Testament economy because the Jews spent most of their lives, of course, either coming from or going to a sacrifice. They had to continually

massacre animals, millions and millions and millions of them to deal with sin, to show the people how wicked they were and how sin required death. It wasn't that those animals took away their sin, they didn't, they couldn't. But what they demonstrated to the people repeatedly was that the wages of sin is...what?...is death...death, death, death, death, death, death. And every time they would sin it was back to another death, back to killing another animal. And they were wearied of that and longing for the ultimate Lamb who once and for all would take away the sin of the world and end this carnage. The animals were symbols that God's law can only be satisfied through death and made the people long with all their hearts for a final substitute, a final substitute.

Well the Father sent one and He didn't come reluctantly, not at all. He said, "No man takes My life from Me," in John 10, "I lay it down of Myself, I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again." He willingly did not hold on to what He had a right to grasp, but let go of it and condescended to die.

So if there was to be reconciliation, the plan had to come from God, He had to initiate it. He had to design it. He had to execute it.

Second thing you see in this text, first the benefactor who is God, second the substitute. And the substitute is identified. "He made Him who knew no sin." That's the identification of the substitute. Who is it? Him who knew no sin. Let me tell you something, folks, that narrows the field to one. Him who knew no sin, who is that? It's not a human being for there is none of them who is righteous, no not one. They've all sinned and come short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23. There's no human being who qualifies. Who is the one who knew no sin? Who is this one? Who is the one who can bear the full wrath of God against sin for somebody else because He doesn't have to bear it for Himself? See, no sinful person could be a substitute, no sinner could die for another sinner because he would have to pay the penalty for his own sin. There had to be a sinless offering. And it had to be a human being because it had to be man who dies for man, but he couldn't be a sinful human being or he would have to die for his own sin and couldn't provide atonement for somebody else's. So it had to be a sinless man.

Well the only way to have a sinless man was to have a man who was God because God alone is sinless. So if you're going to have a sinless man you have to have a man who is God. And that's exactly what God designed...that the second member of the trinity, sinless and perfect, equally holy with the other two members of the trinity would come into the world in the form of a man. He was not to have a human father, Joseph was not the father of Jesus and Joseph knew it. Joseph had never known his wife in a conjugal way. He found out that she was with child, he couldn't believe it. And then the angel said, "That which was conceived in her was of the Holy Spirit." So that Jesus had a human mother that He might be a human, but God was His Father so that He was the God/Man, the sinless human being.

The Old Testament pictured that because when the lamb was selected it had to be a lamb without...what?...spot and without blemish. It had to be a perfect animal without a mark, picturing the real substitute who would be perfect. A man to die for men. God to be sinless so that indeed He could be a substitute.

In Revelation chapter 5 there is a marvelous picture and it points up the fact that no one is qualified except Christ. In Revelation chapter 5 we go to heaven and we're in the throne room of God and God is on the throne and in His hand He has a scroll, sealed with seven seals. This is a title deed to the universe, this is looking at the future when God gets ready to take His universe back from Satan and sin, from the one, Lucifer, who fell and usurped the rulership of this universe.

And so God is holding in His hand, as it were, in this vision the title deed to the universe. Verse 2, John is watching in his vision, he sees a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice and the angel says this, "Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?" And verse 3 says, "No one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it." And I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it." There wasn't anybody. There was not one individual in the created universe, man or angel, who could step forward and execute the contents of this book. No one. And John began to weep. No one to take back the universe from Satan.

Verse 5, "One of the elders said to me, 'Stop weeping, behold the lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the root of David has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.'" Somebody is worthy. Who is it? "The lion from the tribe of Judah." That's a man, out of the tribe of Judah, that's a Jew, from the tribe of Judah. But He's also the root of David...not the branch, not something that came out of David but what produced David. That's God. And in what form is He? Verse 6, "A lamb slain." There's only one who is worthy to take back the universe and that is the one who was born a Jew in every way human but the one who was God the very source from which David came...the one who was the slain lamb. God then had to create a unique virgin-born God/Man in order to be the substitute because the plan demanded a substitute. Justice had to be satisfied. The law had to be vindicated. Wrath had to consume.

So Paul says to the Galatians, "When the fullness of time came God sent forth His Son born of a woman." Wow...why? "In order that He might redeem those who were under the law." Galatians 4:4 and 5. Jesus Christ then is the one who knew no sin, Him who knew no sin is Christ. And the testimony of every one historically affirms that. You can go to the pagan world, start there. Jesus says in John 8:46, "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" Silence and there is still silence. Hear Pilate in Luke 23, Pilate, cynical, vicious, cruel, ungodly, pagan, idolatrous. Pilate said in verse 4 of Luke 23 to the chief priests and the multitudes, "I find no guilt in this man." Verse 14, again he said it, "I have found no guilt in this man." Verse 22 and again the third time, he said to them, "Why? What evil has this man done, I have found in Him no guilt."

Listen to the thief on the cross, "We indeed suffer justly," he says to the other thief, "We're receiving what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Listen to the testimony of the centurion who watched it all in verse 47, "Certainly this man was innocent."

It wasn't just unbelieving people who saw His perfection. How about the Apostles? John who was with Him day and night for three years, John who followed His every footstep and heard His every word and saw His every act and maybe felt His every breath as he leaned on His breast as often as he could, it was John who said in His epistle, 1 John 3 verse 5, "In Him there is no sin." And John said we were eyewitnesses of it. And then there was the writer of Hebrews who affirms the very same reality when he says in chapter 4 of verse 15, "We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses but one who has been tempted in all things as we are tempted, yet without sin." And in chapter 7 the writer of Hebrews says, "He was holy, innocent, undefiled and separate from sinners." And then there was Peter who preached in Acts 3 and he says of Christ, "You have killed the prince of life," and he calls Him a holy and just one. And then you remember it was Peter, specially Peter, who said of Christ that He was a lamb, 1 Peter 1:19, unblemished and spotless, who said of Him in chapter 2 of that same epistle and verse 24, "He bore our sins in His own body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. But He...verse 22...committed no sin." And then in chapter 3 and verse 18 of that same epistle, "God died for sins, the just for the unjust."

Now the testimony of unbelieving men was of his sinlessness. The testimony of those who knew Him best was of His sinlessness. But there's another who gave testimony and that testimony is indeed powerful. It was none other than God the Father Himself. At His baptism recorded in Matthew 3:17 the Father said, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am completely pleased." And at His transfiguration in Matthew 17 verse 5, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am completely pleased." You see, the Father was totally satisfied with the Son. There was nothing in the Son that dissatisfied the Father, He was perfect, sinless.

And maybe the greatest testimony of His sinlessness was the unbroken fellowship He had with God. "I and the Father are one. I and the Father are one." He said that many times. He says that in John 10 verse 30. He says it in John 14 verses 30 and 31. He says it repeatedly in John 17, He says it in verse 11, He says it in verse 21, 22, 23, we're one, we're one, we're one, we're one, we're united, we're united. That was the greatest testimony of His sinlessness was that He had absolutely unbroken communion with God.

Now had He not been man He couldn't be the substitute. Had He not been sinless He couldn't be the substitute. So He had to be man and He had to be God.

Notice our text again, "God made Him who knew no sin," here is the remarkable statement, "to be sin." You see, He had to punish sin but if He punished the sinner the sinner would be destroyed in hell eternally. So He had to take the substitute and put Him in the place of the sinner and punish the substitute instead. He had to be sin. That phrase is very important and I want you to grasp it.

What does it mean that He was made sin? That's an astounding statement. What does it mean? Well, first of all, let me tell you what it doesn't mean and you need to understand this clearly. It does not mean that Christ became a sinner. It does not mean that He committed a sin. It does not mean that He broke God's law. He did not do that. The Scriptures I've just read to you indicate that He had no capacity to sin, that's what theologians call the impeccability of Christ. He had no possibility to sin. He could not sin. He was sinless God while fully man. And certainly it is unthinkable that God would turn Him into a sinner. The idea of God making anybody a sinner is unthinkable, to say nothing of making His holy Son into a sinner.

Well you say, "Well what does it mean then that He was made sin?" Isaiah 53 introduces it to us, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, our sorrows He carried." Verse 5, "He was pierced through for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. And the chastening that fell on Him was because of us." Verse 6, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." He didn't die for His own sins, He died for...what?...for our sins.

What it means is the Lord took all of the iniquity of all of us and it fell on Christ. What do you mean? It wasn't His sin? No, it was our sin. What is it saying? Simply this, God treated Christ as if He were a sinner. How? By making Him pay the penalty for sin though He was innocent. He paid the penalty. God treated Him as if He was the sinner. More than that, God treated Him as if He sinned all the sins of all who would ever believe. Is that incredible? Sin, not His at all, was credited to Him as if He had committed it and paid the price. And He didn't...but it was credited to Him as if He did. That, listen, is the only sense in which Christ was made sin, and the word is He was made sin by imputation. Sin was imputed to Him, it wasn't His, He never sinned. But God put it to His account, charged it to Him and making Him pay the penalty. It would be like some...it would be like all the sinners in all the world charging all their sin to your credit card and you having to pay the bill. Imputation...listen, the guilt of the sins of all who would ever believe God, all who would ever be saved was imputed to Jesus Christ,

credited to Him as if He were guilty of all of it. And then just...as soon as God had credited it to Him, God poured out the full fury of all His wrath against all that sin and all those sinners and Jesus experienced all of that. Is it any wonder at that moment He was alienated from God and said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" He was treated as a sinner. He was treated as a sinner deserves to be treated, with all the fury of just punishment.

Let me go further. He was treated as every sinner cumulatively deserve to be treated and all the fury was poured on Him. He was personally pure--He was officially guilty. He was personally holy--He was forensically guilty.

Look at Galatians chapter 3 verse 10...verse 10 says, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse." All right, you want to try to earn your way to heaven? You want to try to reconcile yourself? You want to keep certain works? Do certain religious duties? Ascribe to some moral law or ceremonial law? You want to achieve your own righteousness? You've got a problem. All of you who try to reconcile to God through works, through what you do are cursed. Why? Because it says in Deuteronomy, "Cursed is everyone who doesn't abide by all things written in the book of the law to perform them."

You know why that curses you, that approach curses you? Because the first time you violate one law you're damned. It just takes one. Cursed is everyone who doesn't keep all that is written in the book of the law. So if you're going to try to reconcile yourself to God through human effort, every time you try to do that you put yourself under a curse because it only takes one violation. So the whole human race is cursed. And everybody in every religion on the face of the earth trying to achieve reconciliation by their own efforts is cursed. All this curse of iniquity has to be paid for. There has to be a penalty for this curse. So verse 13 says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse by being made a curse for us." Wow! That's the point. He became a curse for us. He took the full fury of God's wrath on our behalf. God placed Christ in the path of the curse and trampled Him with exhausted judgment.

And again I remind you, that it is imputation that is crucial to understanding reconciliation. He became sin by imputation. Our sin was imputed to Him...follow this...just as believers become holy by imputation. You remember that? Being given His righteousness.

Let me say it another way. Christ dying on the cross did not become evil like we are, nor do we by virtue of the cross become as holy as He is. You say, "Well what happens?" It's imputation. God puts sin to Christ's credit, our sin and puts Christ's righteousness to our credit. It's not that we are so righteous God is satisfied. It's that because the penalty is paid and the guilt has been met that God can credit to us the righteousness of Christ. That's the gospel.

The only sense in which you are made righteous through justification is by imputation. And that's the same sense in which Christ was made sin. He is made sin because God credits our sin to Him. We're made righteous because God credits His righteousness to us.

Listen, I'm a Christian, you're a Christian, I am not so righteous that as I am I can stand before a holy God. Are you? I've got a lot of sin in my life and I would say if I got anywhere near God what Peter said, "Depart from Me, O Lord, for I am...what?...I'm still sinful." But God looks at me and does not consider me on the virtue of my human morality, He considers me on the virtue of the imputed righteousness of Christ which covers me. This is the point.

Well, the benefactor is God, the substitute is Christ and by imputation receives our sins and dies for them, taking our place. Thirdly, the beneficiaries and these last points are brief. Thirdly, the beneficiaries. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin...here it is...on our behalf." On our



behalf. Who you talking about, Paul? Who is "our"? Well it's the same as the "we" in verse 20. "We are ambassadors." It's the same as the "us" in verse 19, "He committed to us the reconciliation ministry." It's the same as the "us" in verse 18, "Us who have been given this ministry." Who is this "our, we, us" group.

Well they're in verse 17 described, "Any man who is...what?...in Christ who is a new creation, old things passed away and new things have come." There is a transformation. There is a new creation at salvation. There is. We are transformed. We are changed. But even with that change we wouldn't have sufficient righteousness to satisfy a holy God. And so He has to cover us in the righteousness of Christ to make us acceptable until He can get us to glory and we'll be made righteous. And it is for us, us who are in Christ then, us who have been reconciled that He died. He died in our place.

The actual substitution in its efficacy was for believers, those who would believe. He died for our sins. He died for us. He died in our place.

The final point, the benefit. And what did He provide us? "In order that," this is the purpose of it, "we might become the righteousness of God in Him." See, there's that imputation. What is the benefit? We become righteous before God. This is what justification does. And the righteousness that we are given is the very righteousness of Christ. Listen to what Paul said in Philippians 3:9, "We are now found in Christ not having a righteousness of my own," he says. Not some righteousness derived from keeping the law but a righteousness through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God. Wow! It's imputed to us. He's holy, God imputed sin to Him. We're sinful, God imputes holiness to us.

The very righteousness which God requires to accept the sinner is the very righteousness which God provides. When God looks at you He sees you covered by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. That's why all your sin is automatically forgiven in the eternal sense because Jesus already paid the penalty, right? God can't hold you responsible for your sin, Jesus paid the full penalty for it, took the full fury for it.

You say, "Well what about the sins I commit after I'm a Christian?" Well He died for those too because you weren't even born when He died. They were all future. In fact, He is the lamb slain from before...what?...the foundation of the world, before even the creation. The plan was for Him to die for all the sins of all who will ever believe.

This is the righteousness that Romans 3 talks about. It's the righteousness of God, verse 21, apart from the law. Verse 22, it's the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe. And that's the key. How do you get in on this? Believe. Believe what? Believe that you're a sinner, believe you're in a desperate situation, you're desperately alienated from God. Believe that you have no hope of reconciliation and you will in this life live godlessly and in the next life you will suffer eternal torment. And believe all of that. And then believe that God sent His Son into the world in the form of a man to die as your substitute and take your place and that He took the full fury of the wrath of God upon Him. And believe that the affirmation that God's justice was satisfied was the fact that God raised Jesus...what?...from the dead. And when God raised Him from the dead He was saying, "I am satisfied." And then God exalted Jesus to His right hand where He sits at the right hand of God on the throne and God says when that was done, when He offered Himself and satisfied My justice, I gave Him...Philippians 2...a name which is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee in the universe must bow and every tongue must confess that Jesus is Lord. That's what you believe. That's the gospel.

And when you believe that by faith, simply believing that, God in His mercy takes the righteousness of Jesus Christ and imputes it to you because your sins were imputed to Christ when He died on the cross. The Father knew you were there when the Son died. Your name was written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the foundation of the world and the atonement that Christ made was for you. And you come to believe and you receive the imputed righteousness. And then you live in this life with God in your life and in eternity in the presence of God in absolute perfection. That's the gospel. That's Christianity. That's it.

The benefactor is God, it's all His plan, it comes out of His love. The substitute is Jesus Christ who took your place, the perfect God/Man. The beneficiaries, all of us for whom He died, those who will believe. And the benefit, you receive the righteousness of God imputed to you as if you were equal to Jesus Christ in holiness. And some day you will be made holy. But until then you're covered with the righteousness of God in Christ. And it becomes yours through faith, believe, repent, put your faith in Jesus Christ. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we come to You at this time and ask that everyone of us might look into our hearts and be sure that we have been reconciled to God. Thank You for giving all of us the ministry of reconciliation. Thank You that You have not only reconciled us but called us to cry to others, "Be ye reconciled to God, it is available, it is possible, God has made a way." And we cry that to sinners here this morning who have not been reconciled and we ask, O God, that You would prompt their hearts to believe and to repent, turning from their sin and saying, "I want forgiveness for my sin, I want the hope of heaven, I want God in my life, I want to be reconciled." O Father, I just pray that Your Holy Spirit will work that marvelous miracle of reconciliation in hearts today. And we thank You for bearing our sin and for letting us bear Your righteousness. This is all overwhelming and we are unworthy, but grateful. Speak, Father, to those hearts who do not know the Savior, who have not been reconciled and draw them to Yourself. And may they have confidence in the words of Jesus who said, "Him that comes to Me I'll never turn aside." And we ask that sinners might come today and in faith embrace the righteousness provided for them by the one who bore their sin. We thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

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