

Faith Reformed Church
Stevensville, Ontario
May 11, 2008
Morning Service

Text: Hebrews 5:1-10

Sermon: Our Great High Priest Part III: The Source of Our Salvation

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; AMEN.

The Reformation can be boiled down to two words: infusion and imputation. Are we saved by an infused righteousness—a righteousness that is our own, or are we saved by an imputed righteousness—a righteousness that has been earned by someone else and give to us? To put it another way, are we saved by a native righteousness or an alien righteousness? How is it that we are made fit to stand in the presence of a holy God? Since the time of the Reformation and the Council of Trent the Roman Catholic Church has held that a person must be saved by a righteousness that is his very own. Righteousness must be infused in him. They say that if you are not right in and of yourself, how can you ever be right with God? It is only on the basis of your own righteousness that you can be saved. How do you become righteous? By the grace of God you do certain works God gives you to do through the church: the sacraments of baptism, penance, the mass and the last rites. After all this, because your righteousness is still not perfect, time must be spent in purgatory where, through suffering, you are purified and made righteous enough to stand in God's presence. Make yourself righteous and God will receive you; you will enter his presence with joy.

To this the Reformers said, “No.” They maintained that our own righteousness could never be good enough to merit our salvation and argued that the only righteousness pure enough to allow us to enter the presence of God was the righteousness of Jesus Christ. His righteousness was the only thing that could save a sinner. If Christ would freely, graciously cover a sinner with his righteousness, if Christ would impute or transfer his righteousness to the sinner—he could draw near to God. And to get covered with the righteousness of Christ, the Reformers denied that you had to do certain works—works like baptism or penance. They said that you simply had to believe. Trust the promise Christ made to forgive sinners and cover them with his righteousness is a promise he made for you personally. The righteousness of Christ comes to sinners by faith. It becomes theirs as surely as if they themselves were righteous. Christ’s righteousness becomes the basis of their acceptance by the heavenly Father.

Well, that is what the Roman Church says on the one hand and what the evangelical church says on the other. The real question, however, is this: What does the Bible say about our salvation? Our lesson from the Letter to the Hebrews addresses that question when it says of Jesus that “he became the source of eternal salvation,” and so in the sermon this morning I want to take a look at three things. First, we will look at what salvation requires.

Second, we will look at how Jesus became the source of salvation. And third, we will consider for whom Jesus has become the source of salvation. What, how and for whom.

First, what does salvation require? To put it another way, “What is necessary for someone to enjoy eternal fellowship with God?” Here is the Bible’s answer: To have fellowship with God you must possess a perfect righteousness that meets the perfect standards set forth in God’s perfect law. The prophet Habakkuk said of God that his eyes were too pure to look upon evil (Hab. 1:3). If you are tainted with sin, he cannot look upon you with approval. Our Lord, in the Sermon on the Mount, said, “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). That is what is required.

And if you think it sounds difficult, remember this: It is harder than it seems. Righteousness, you see, has several dimensions. Righteousness must be positive; that is to say it must include an active doing of everything that is required. Righteousness must also be negative; that is, it must exclude anything that would cause a stain from sin. Righteousness must also be outward. That is, it must conform to the letter of the law. But that is not enough, for the law must be obeyed from the heart and not just from the

hand. All things must be done in an inward spirit of faith, with thanksgiving and praise rendered unto the Lord.

Let me give you an illustration that can prevent us from tricking ourselves into believing that the achieving of righteousness is a simple matter. In Matthew 19 Jesus meets a rich young ruler. This young man asks Jesus what he must do to get eternal life. Jesus says, “Obey the commandments.” The young man sighs a big sigh of relief and says, in effect, “Is that all? I thought it would be harder. I have followed the law all my life! I guess I’m in.” Jesus says, in effect, “Not so fast. Let me put you to the test. You think you have followed the law? Let’s see. The first commandment is, ‘Thou shalt have no other gods before me.’ Let’s start there. No other gods. Is there something more important to you than God Almighty? Sell everything you have, give it to the poor and follow me. Then you will have eternal life. There’s your test.” The rich young ruler walked away sad, his money being more precious to him than his eternal destiny. His righteousness was shown to be a sham when held up against God’s holy and perfect standards.

Some years ago James Boice spoke to a young man, a shipping clerk in Philadelphia, about the nature of sin and the nature of Christ. In the

course of the conversation he told this story. A man was all dressed up to go to a party. He had his best clothes on. His shoes were shined. His pants were pressed. His jacket was brushed. As he was walking down the sidewalk a car drove past, hit a puddle in the gutter and sent up a shower that soaked him. It was dark outside and so, at first glance, when the man surveyed the damage he thought it might be slight. He could tell he was wet, but since, in the dark it didn't look too bad he continued on to the party. As he continued down the sidewalk and turned a corner he approached a streetlamp. Half way there he looked down and saw that the damage to his clothes was more than he had imagined. He was not only wet; it seemed that he was mud stained as well. He started to worry, but he still walked on. He thought he could get by. Well, by the time he was directly under the streetlamp, the full extent of the damage had become clear. He said to himself, "This is much worse than I thought. I'm going to have to change my clothes." After Boice told this story of how, in the light of Christ, our sins become exposed, the young man looked at him and said with a deep sigh, "But I don't have any clean clothes."

And there you have it. We need a righteousness that is perfect and unsullied and our problem is we don't have it. And listen: The problem is not that we are morally flawed; the problem is that we are morally corrupt.

We are not sinners because we sin. It is much worse than that. We sin because we are sinners. Our garments are not smudged but covered with filth. Isaiah 64:6 tells us that all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. In Zechariah 3 we have a picture of Joshua the high priest standing before the Lord and before Satan who is accusing him. He is dressed in filthy clothes. The word for “filthy” includes vomit and excrement. Such is the righteousness of the high priest. In Philippians 3 Paul looks at all his own righteousness and says that he considers it “rubbish.” The word translated “rubbish” means “dung.”

Now we may not like this but it is what the Bible plainly teaches and we simply have to come to grips with it. The most righteous men in the Bible all knew themselves to be without saving righteousness. Job spoke out boldly about his righteousness, until the clouds parted and God appeared and then all Job could say was, “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5-6). When Isaiah caught a glimpse of the throne room of God he declared, “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty” (Isaiah 6:5). When the Apostle John saw the risen and exalted Christ in Revelation 1:17 he fell down as though dead. Beloved, if

men like this could not stand before a holy God, how in the world could we ever imagine that we might?

Righteousness is required if we are to enjoy the presence and fellowship of a thrice holy God. Righteousness is something that we do not have. The Letter to the Hebrews, however, tells us that Christ has become the source of our salvation. That is to say, it is Christ who supplies the righteousness that we need. He is the source and the fountain of the righteousness that saves. But how did Christ get this righteousness? What did he have to do to acquire it? Look at verse 7. “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death and he was heard because of his reverent submission.” These verses are a summary of the earthly life and ministry on Jesus in which he fulfilled all righteousness by his wholehearted devotion and obedience to his heavenly Father’s will. You can think of it this way. During his earthly ministry Jesus underwent trials and temptations. He met each of those trials with wholehearted obedience, submission and reverence for his Father’s will. He proved himself to be a man of utter holiness, faithfulness and integrity. He obeyed the law in all things. He obeyed it outwardly and inwardly. He obeyed it positively and negatively.

He obeyed the precepts of the law fully and accepted the punishment of the law freely. He loved God with his whole heart and his neighbour as himself.

You can think of it this way. When Adam was tempted he fell into sin and plunged mankind into ruin. When Jesus came he too was tempted. And he was tempted in a way much more strenuous than Adam. Adam was well fed. He was in a garden paradise. Jesus was hungry and thirsty and in the desert. Jesus, the second Adam, did what the first Adam had failed to do. Rather than deny the Word of God Jesus rested upon it. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness by resisting the devil until he fled.

In Isaiah 11:5 there is a prophecy about Jesus. It says, “Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.” It is a prophecy proved to be true over and over again. Jesus said to his enemies, (John 8:46) “Which of you convicts me of sin?” Pilate said of him, “I find no guilt in him” (John 18:38). When Jesus died there was a soldier looking on. Luke records it in his twenty-third chapter. “The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, ‘Surely this was a righteous man.’” Peter says of him, “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth” (I Peter 2:22). And Paul says of him, “For our sake [God] made him to be sin

who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God”
(II Corinthians 5:21).

In this world of tribulation and sorrow Jesus learned obedience—he went from trial to trial to trial in obedience and faithfulness and love to the father. Though he was in torment, sorrowful unto death and sweating great drops of blood he was able to say to his Father from the heart, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” And on the cross, though forsaken, he died committing his spirit into the hands of God. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness to the very end, crying out to the Father, trusting him and loving and forgiving sinners. As a result of his obedience—of his fulfilling all righteousness, he became the source of eternal salvation.

Jesus is the source or the fountain of the righteousness that we need if we are to stand before our holy God. The question that remains for us is this: To whom is this righteousness given? Or to put it another way, for whom has Christ lived and died? Our lesson says that “he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” What does it mean to obey Christ? I spoke about this briefly last week. In John 6 some followers of Jesus ask him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” In

John 3:36 it says, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” Jesus is the source of eternal salvation for all who believe in him. For all who have faith in him. For all who trust that the work he did as our Great High Priest at Calvary is a work done for them. Jesus is the source of eternal salvation for all who cast themselves upon his finished work at take his righteousness as their own.

Beloved we can never be saved by our own righteousness; it takes nothing less than the perfect righteousness of Christ to perfectly cover our sins. I have told this story before but I will tell it again because it perfectly illustrates the point. D. James Kennedy was visiting people in his neighbourhood doing outreach evangelism. He knocked on the door of one house and was ushered round the back where a family reunion and barbeque was going on. Kennedy introduced himself, had a hamburger and began to talk to the members of the family. Things go around to spiritual matters and he asked them, “If you were to die tonight and had to stand before the judgement seat of God, what would you say if he asked, ‘Why should I let you in to my heaven?’”

Now most of the family members were Christian and they began to answer the question by testifying to the grace of God in Christ. One said, “I would answer by saying, “Christ died for my sins.” Another one said, “I am trusting in the finished work of Christ at Calvary. Another said, “I have been washed in the blood of the Lamb.” And so it went, on down the line. One after the other testified, saying, “Jesus saved me,” “Jesus covered me,” “Jesus washed me,” “Jesus gave me eyes to see and ears to hear and a spirit to repent.” And when they got to the end of the line the matriarch of the family said, “I would say, ‘I am a pretty good person. That’s why you should let me in.’”

If that is your plea at the judgement seat of God please believe me: You will perish. But it doesn’t have to be our plea. You can plead Christ and his righteousness and his blood. You can follow the Apostle Paul. There had been a day when he would have gladly made his stand upon his own righteousness. But then the Lord appeared to him and everything changed. Listen to him in the third chapter of Philippians:

If anyone things he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

Paul was claiming that he was as righteous as anyone has ever been. But

then he goes on to add this:

But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Jesus Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

All of his good works, all of his zeal, all of his background as a Jew—he put them all away so with his hands emptied he could receive the true righteousness of Christ that comes through faith alone. He did it so he could meet his goal.

I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

There is an old hymn that urges us to put aside our sullied righteousness so that we might put on the true and saving righteousness of Christ.

Lay aside the garments that are stained with sin
And be washed in the blood of the Lamb.
There's a fountain flowing for the soul unclean;
O be washed in the blood of the Lamb.

I urge you to do so. In Christ's name. AMEN.