

## WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM

When God created the world, he created it good. The Scriptures say, “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” He created everything as good, and that includes man, whom God created in His own image. The Preacher of Ecclesiastes wrote, “Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.” (Ecclesiastes 7:29) When the first man, Adam sinned, he not only died, but also brought sin and death to his race. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” (Romans 5:12) To the Ephesians he wrote that all men come into the world “dead in trespasses and sins.” (Ephesians 2:1) Although God reveals Himself to men, they ignore Him. They do not worship God, their Creator, but rather worship His creation. (Romans 1:18–21) Because men ignore God, He ignores them. Men are, therefore, abandoned. Saint Paul describes sinful mankind this way:

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.” (Romans 1:28–31)

The Scriptures say, “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Genesis 6:5) In the first generation after Adam men began killing each other. They killed in order to get what they desired, and they killed because they were angry about being deprived of what they desired. The Scriptures say that the earth was filled with violence. (Genesis 6:11)

Men are incorrigible sinners. God created the world with truth, goodness, and beauty, but men have ruined it with lies, wickedness, and ugliness. Because God is righteous, He cannot tolerate sinners. Habakkuk the prophet, concerning the wicked men of his time, said to the Lord, “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?” (Habakkuk 1:13) God is forbearing with sinners, but His forbearance has a limit. With a great flood, God destroyed mankind, saving only righteous Noah and his household. (Genesis 6:13) God loves His creation, and did not utterly destroy it. Men defiled the world, so God washed the world clean, giving it a new beginning, a new birth. If God would not tolerate sin, and if He would not destroy the world, then He was bound to save it, and that is precisely what He determined to do. This was not an afterthought, however, for, immediately after the first man sinned, God said to the serpent, who had led mankind into sin and death, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

After the Great Flood, God began to redeem the world. He said to Abraham:

Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (Genesis 12:1–3)

God began by commanding Abraham to separate from the rest of mankind, including his kin, and from his homeland. From Abraham God would make a new people, with their own land. He would make Abraham, one man, a great nation of men. Abraham would be a blessing to the world, and so the world would know, and to bless, the name of Abraham. God would do good to those that would do good to Abraham, and He would curse those that would curse Abraham. God would bless Abraham, and Abraham, in turn, would be a blessing to the entire world. The Scriptures say, “So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him.” (Genesis 12:4) Abraham believed the Lord, and, believing Him, obeyed Him. He left his family, trusting the Lord to take him to a new land which he could call his own.

When Abraham did finally arrive at the promised land, the Lord repeated His promise. (Genesis 12:7) Some time later, Lot, who had traveled with Abraham, left him, and struck out on his own. It must have seemed to Abraham that his number was decreasing, not increasing. So, the Lord renewed His promise. He said to Abraham:

Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee. (Genesis 13:14–17)

The Lord told Abraham to look in every direction, and to rest assured that all of it would belong to him, and to his descendants. Abraham’s descendants would live in the promised land, and the number of his descendants would be vast. About ten years later, Abraham, having had no offspring, asked the Lord for reassurance, and the Lord was pleased to give him the reassurance he desired. The Lord told Abraham to look at the stars in the heavens, and he said to him, “Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.” The Scriptures relate Abraham’s response: “And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” (Genesis 15:4; compare Psalm 106:31) God promised that Abraham’s descendants would be innumerable, and Abraham trusted the Lord, and, because Abraham trusted the Lord, the Lord judged Abraham to be a righteous man. God then swore an oath that He would fulfill His promise.

About fifteen years later, when Abraham and Sara, his wife, were well beyond child-bearing years, the Lord appeared to Abraham inform him that the time had come for the promise to be fulfilled. The Lord repeated His promise, and gave Abraham the rite of circumcision as a sign of His promise, and to distinguish the people of God from the rest of the world. (Genesis 17) Abraham and Sara did indeed have a son, whom they named Isaac, and a number of children besides. Abraham’s descendants eventually settled in Egypt, and there they continued to grow in number. The Scriptures say, “And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.” (Exodus 1:7) Their proliferation was so great, that the Pharaoh became concerned that the Israelites might turn against the Egyptians and overthrow them. (Exodus 1:9, 10) So, the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites. The Lord is ever true to His promises, however, and, when His people cried out to Him for deliverance, He responded to their cry. The Scriptures say, “And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.” (Exodus 2:24, 25) The Lord would deliver His people from their bondage, and curse their enemies.

After the Exodus, the Lord at Mount Sinai made a covenant with His people in which He promised to be their God so long as they obeyed His law. He said, “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine.” (Exodus 19:4, 5) All the peoples of the earth belong to God, but Israel were His special people, His covenant people, His treasured possession. The Israelites agreed to the Lord’s terms, and said, “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.” (Exodus 19:8) To seal the covenant, Moses sprinkled the people with the blood of oxen that had been sacrificed as peace offerings to the Lord.” (Exodus 24:5–8) This constituted Israel as a nation, and made Israel the first nation to be redeemed by the Lord. God was fulfilling His promise.

Saint Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, gives a theological interpretation of God’s covenant with Abraham, and His covenant with Israel. Saint Paul wrote this letter to the Church of Rome, which church comprised both Jews and Gentiles. Some Jews were inclined to say that a man is righteous before God, justified, by keeping the law of Moses, and some of them even boasted of their keeping it. Saint Paul argued that every man, whether Jew or Gentile, is “justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:24) There is only one God, Saint Paul argued, and so there can be only one people of God, and all are justified in the same way, in the way of faith. He wrote, “Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.” (Romans 3:29, 30)

Saint Paul, to prove his point, referred to the example of Abraham, the father of the Hebrew nation. He wrote:

What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. (Romans 4:1–5)

The apostle asked what standing with God Abraham found by the merit of his works. If Abraham were righteous by his keeping the law, then he, like the Pharisee, might think he has something to boast about. Yet, there is no boasting before God, because God does not justify men on their merits. Abraham is proof of the fact. The Scriptures say, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” Abraham was righteous before God by faith. When a man works at his occupation, he is paid a wage; his employer gives him what he has earned, what he deserves. When an employer pays a wage, he does not do so as grace, but as compensation; he is in debt to his employee, and he must pay his debt. God does not accept a man only after he has by his good works earned a position with Him; God accepts a man by faith. If a man tries to earn his way into God’s debt, or even into God’s favor, then God will not accept him. If, however, a man believes in God who graciously justifies the sinner, then God considers that man to be righteous. God does not accept a man as righteous by merit through good works, but by grace through faith.

Saint Paul further explains:

For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: Because the law worketh wrath: for

where no law is, there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. (Romans 4:13–17)

The blessing of right standing with God is not only for Jews, not only for those who received circumcision, because God made the promise to Abraham before circumcision; circumcision was later added as a sign. Abraham was righteous by faith before circumcision. God justifies men by faith so that all men, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, which is to say, whether Jew or Gentile may be justified. God made a promise to Abraham, that Abraham would through his seed inherit the world. This is to say, God promised Abraham that all the world would be his descendents, and counted as God's people. This promise came to Abraham, and to his descendents, not through the law of Moses, but through the righteousness of faith. The law of Moses came long after Abraham and the promise. When God made the promise to Abraham, He did not stipulate that the fulfillment of the promise depended upon Abraham's righteousness. Abraham had simply to believe the promise. If those only who were given the law of Moses, which is to say, Jews, are heirs of the promise, then Gentiles are excluded, and then God's promise that Abraham would be the father of many nations would be nullified. The law of Moses declared to God's covenant people what He required of them, but it did not empower them to conform, or to atone for their sins when they failed to conform. Because men are sinners, they could only fail to keep the law, and so the law served to expose their sinfulness, and to condemn them to die. God's promise is a matter of faith, and grace, so that all mankind, Gentile, as well as Jew, might receive it. God would have all men to be saved, whether the Jews who received circumcision and the law of Moses, or Gentiles who did not receive those things. By faith, all men may be sons of Abraham, and, more importantly, sons of God.

Early in Jesus's earthly ministry, Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus under cover of darkness, no doubt for fear of those who opposed Jesus. Because of the miracles Jesus did, Nicodemus believed that Jesus was a teacher sent by God. Jesus told him, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Because every man is a sinner, if any man would enter into God's kingdom, then he must be changed, he must be given a new nature and a new life. Nicodemus who ought to have understood Jesus, did not. Jesus spoke of spiritual birth, but Nicodemus understood Him to speak of physical birth, and he was skeptical. So, Jesus said the same thing in other words. He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." He meant that, unless a man had his sins washed away, and was given new life by the Spirit, then he could not enter God's kingdom. Just as the wind blows according to its own design, and no one can predict its movements, so the Spirit regenerates whomever He will. Nicodemus was bewildered, and asked how such things were possible. Nicodemus, being a teacher in Israel, should have known. Jesus and the Spirit bore witness to Jesus, but the rulers of Israel did not believe their testimony. Moreover, Nicodemus and the others were not able to understand Jesus's parables, similitudes taken from the natural world, let alone plain speech. No man has ascended into heaven to learn spiritual things; only Jesus, the Son of God, who came down from heaven, can reveal such things. Jesus made another comparison. When Israel complained against the Lord about the lack of food and water in the wilderness He sent fiery serpents to kill them with their deadly bites. The people asked Moses to appeal to the Lord for mercy. The Lord told Moses to fashion a serpent of brass, and to suspend it on a pole. When anyone would look at the serpent lifted up, he would be healed. (Numbers 21:4–9) In a similar way, Jesus

was to be lifted up in crucifixion. If anyone looks to Jesus for salvation from the deadly bite of his sins, then he will be saved. Jesus explained why He must be crucified:

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. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (John 3:16, 17)

God created the world, including making man in His own image. He created the world good, but man ruined it with his sin. God hates sinners, but, because he loves His creation, He would rather redeem it than destroy it. So He sent His Son into the world to die for sins, so that, if any man believe in Jesus, if any man believe that He is the Christ, the Son of the living God, if any man look to Him for salvation, then Jesus will save him from His sins, Jesus will save men until every man alive is saved, and every nation is blessed, according to the promise of God.

Let us understand that every man comes into the world a sinner deserving death. Let us know that God promised to save the world. Let us believe in Jesus, the Savior of the world.

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.