

July 28, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Communion
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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TO BECOME GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS
Romans 3:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:21

Stories about genies in a bottle and magic lamps have probably been around almost as long as human history. The world of make believe has told many stories about magic that turns toads into princes and normal little girls into queens. Disney has capitalized on this for years, beginning with talking mice and dogs, and now to the modern frenzy of a prince who becomes a beast only to turn back into a prince because an ordinary girl from the village showed him love.

The story line of rags to riches because of love is not relegated to cartoon characters. Some of the great writers in the English language have penned heart-touching stories like Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, or his mysteries like *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*. Who wouldn't be happy to read about Frances Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* who benefitted from a rich man's kindness?

Good English writing might have fallen on hard times in materialistic, hedonistic America. Now Americans prefer to watch television shows or You Tube features about ordinary folks who buy lottery tickets and win megabucks. It's still the same concept, the same drama, of unexpected rags to riches. We don't get so excited about stories about rich kids or trust-fund babies who by the "luck of the draw" are born into well-to-do families and never have to work. There is not much chance of that happening for us normal folks. But winning the lottery? Everyone who buys a ticket has a chance to become wealthy. Not much of a chance, but a chance nonetheless.

I wonder if our innate love for the rags-to-riches stories is rooted in our conscience. Is there something in our sin-infected conscience that knows the wonderful story of how sinners, the

enemies of God, can be brought into His family where we enjoy the riches of His righteousness? Even if we never heard the gospel story, would we still wonder if there isn't some way for us to be miraculously transported from this awful life of sin, sickness, and sorrow, into the bliss of paradise?

It doesn't take a theologian to figure out that life without God is not all that rewarding. Coming to that conclusion requires simple honesty. A quick read through Ecclesiastes enlightens us to the conclusions of the wise man Solomon. "Nope," he said, "Life is not worth much outside a relationship with God." The Scriptures are full of descriptions, analysis, and conclusions about the uselessness of sinful lives. But the Scriptures are just as full of the wonderful promises because of Christ's righteous works. The real rags to riches story is how God graciously lifts slaves of sin out of the pits of uselessness and covers us with the righteous garments of Jesus Christ. It is a story we can experience and celebrate because Jesus gave Himself for us.

By Nature We Have Become Worthless (Romans 3:10-12).

Here is some news that most people are not very excited to hear: Scripture condemns all of us. That is Paul's argument beginning with verse ten of our text where he wrote, *as it is written: (v.10a)*. In other words, Paul's argument was not from his own wisdom or experience, but was a compilation of Old Testament Scripture truth.

For example, the statements in verses eleven and twelve come from the first three verses in Psalm 14: *The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good. The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one (Psalm 14:1-3).*

Paul's argument in verse thirteen comes from Psalms 5:9 and 140:3. The first part of verse thirteen: *For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue (Psalm 5:9)*. The second part of verse thirteen: *They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's, and under their lips is the venom of asps" (Psalm 140:3).*

The argument in verse fourteen is from Psalm 10:7, *His mouth is filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under his tongue are mischief and iniquity.* Verses fifteen through seventeen are virtually taken out of Isaiah 59:7-8. *Their feet run to evil, and they are swift to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their highways. The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made their roads crooked; no one who treads on them knows peace.* And verse eighteen is lifted from Psalm 36:1, *Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes.*

It is certainly written. God has clearly described and explained the serious condition of humanity. This is why it is so important to read and know the entire Bible. The Word of God alone fully, accurately assesses the human condition. Human conclusions and opinions must of necessity be jaded and opinionated in favor of ourselves. It is much easier to accept the idea that we are the product of a series of incredible coincidences. It is much more popular to accept the probability that our DNA is screwed up, and all we really need is counseling or meds. It is painful to read the Bible and discover that, by nature, we are far removed from the standard of being image-bearers of our Creator.

God's law reveals how far we are removed from God. The broad scope of that separation is inevitable because God's law is a reflection of His character. We understand righteousness based on the requirements of the law. That is why a fair assessment of the law reveals how impossible it is to keep it. In fact, the purpose of the law is to show how far we sinful people are from the righteous character of God. Paul argued later in this letter that if it had not been for the law, he (and we) would not have known sin (Romans 7:7). So, though it is painful to hear, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good (Romans 7:12).

God's law reveals our plight because of our sinful condition. From the outset of God giving the law we learned, *"Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them."* And all the people shall say, "Amen." (Deuteronomy 27:26) That doesn't give sinful people like us much hope. Read more and discover the quotations from the Old Testament in the New

Testament letters. *For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them" (Galatians 3:10).* And so James rightly concludes that it is impossible for us **not** to be guilty of breaking the law. *For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it (James 2:10).*

The only possible conclusion for us is to realize that our natural condition is pitiful. Indeed, that is precisely what Paul concluded in verse ten. No one is righteous! *None is righteous, no, not one (v.10b).* No one reflects God's character. No one manifests the traits with which God created humanity. No one is allowed to fellowship with our Creator.

As a result, it is fair to conclude that all of us by nature are worthless. In the words of inspired Scripture: *No one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one" (Romans 3:11-12).* What does it mean to conclude that no one understands? The word translated "understands" means to comprehend or gain insight. The ability to gather evidence, dissect the evidence, and come to a right conclusion. The issue here is God and His righteousness. The brightest minds from the ancient philosophers like Aristotle and Plato, to the modern brains like Richard Dawkins all miss—completely miss—the truth about God.

As if that condition is not bad enough, we read that *having become worthless no one seeks for God.* God has revealed so much about Himself in creation. More than that, there is something within the human soul that desires to search for God or for something to fill the God-shaped void in our hearts. But fallen human nature looks in all the wrong places.

We are so pitiful that *everyone has turned aside from God.* We cannot find God because we turn away from God. Like Adam, who became covered with the guilt of sin and tried to avoid God, we run away from His righteous presence. We know instinctively that we are a filthy mess spiritually. We turn away from our Maker as if we are hoping He won't notice.

But the end of the game reveals that *everyone has become worthless.* As a result of our avoidance of God and His righteousness, we become worthless. The circumstances of sin have rendered that

which God intended to be useful for His glory into something useless. We are like the useless servant who hid the master's talent in the ground. Therefore, it is fairly said of our fair race of humanity that no one does good. That does not conclude that everyone does evil all the time. Rather, because of our sin-infected character, even the good that we do is assessed as evil in God's eyes. Isaiah put it like this: *We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away (Isaiah 64:6)*. Our lot in eternity sounds a bit hopeless, doesn't it? Oh but there is good news because of Jesus.

By God's Grace We Become His Righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Hear this incredible news: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21)*. God the Father made God the Son to be sin. That is especially incredible in that God the Son knew no sin. He especially did not sin while He was in heaven. That very thought is inconceivable, or should be. How could the Son sin when He and the Father are one? God the Father cannot endure sin or be in sin's presence. Remember Jesus' instruction about prayer. He said, *Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name" (Matthew 6:9)*.

Furthermore, God the Holy Spirit would not tolerate sin in heaven. His ministry is to convict of sin, to show how exceedingly sinful it is. How could sin be allowed to reside in His presence in eternity? We know that God the Son was sinless in heaven by the Father's affirmation of His Son's sinlessness when He began His earthly ministry. *And behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17)*. The Father would not be pleased with even His Son if He had ever sinned.

God the Son of necessity could not know or do sin while He was on earth. If He was to be the sacrifice for sin, He had to exemplify the spotless lamb of the Old Testament sacrifices. The substitute for sin had to be spotless. He desired to do the will of the Father who sent Him (John 5:30). The Father's will would certainly be sinless.

And the testimony about Jesus while He was on earth affirmed that He had no sin. Over halfway through that ministry God the Father again affirmed His pleasure in His sinless Son. *And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him" (Mark 9:7)*.

Then there was multiple human testimony about the Son's sinlessness. John who lived with Jesus three years wrote, *"In Him is no sin" (1 John 3:5)*. Peter who also lived with Jesus said that He is the *"holy and righteous one" (Acts 3:14)*. Peter taught, *"We are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Peter 1:19)*. He said, *"He committed no sin" (1 Peter 2:22)*, and that *"He is the just one" (1 Peter 3:18)*.

Even the Christ's Pharisaical opponents could not convict Him. Jesus asked them, *"Which of you convicts me of sin?"* No one could answer. Pilate the governor, after much investigation, repeatedly claimed, *"I find no guilt in this man" (Luke 23:4,14,22)*.

Jesus Christ, God the Son, alone, among all of humanity was sinless, pure, and holy in life. Are we then shocked to read that God the Father made Him to be sin? That does not mean that Jesus Christ became a sinner. That was impossible. If He became a sinner, He was no more qualified to redeem us than we are ourselves. Besides, God the Father who cannot tempt toward sin would never make anyone a sinner.

Trying to wrap our minds around this truth is difficult. Isaiah helps us with his description of the Father's work of making the Son to be sin for us. *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:4-6)*.

Why did the perfectly sinless, pure and just God charge the Son as a sinner even though He was not? God the Father did what He did so that we can become God's righteousness. *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21)*. Christ took sin upon Himself for our sake. The pronoun *our* is very important. It refers to

the people who represent Christ as *ambassadors* (v.20). Back up one verse in the context and see that *our* refers to the people who have received the *message of reconciliation* (v.19). Go back another verse and discover that *our* is the people who *Christ has reconciled to God* and who have *been given the message of reconciliation* (v.18). One more time and you will see in verse seventeen that *our* refers to the people who are *new creations in Christ* (v.17).

All of those statements refer to believers, Christians, us. Christ became sin for us who are born again, who have been reconciled with our Creator, who have experienced the miracle of regeneration.

Now the most amazing truth of all. In Christ we become God's righteousness. In light of the reality that by nature we have become worthless, this is a remarkable statement (Romans 3:12). This was God's purpose and plan in eternity past. Christ had to become sin for us because God had to be justified in causing us to become His righteousness. No sinner could possibly pay the penalty for sin. Therefore, no sin could possibly be covered over.

But because of Christ's atonement, we who embrace Christ by faith have our sins lifted up and carried away. God our Creator justifiably declares that we are righteous. In our standing before God, we are as pristine, as sin-free, as pure, as the Beloved Son Himself.

John MacArthur noted, "When repentant sinners acknowledge their sin (Psalm 32:5), affirm Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9), and trust solely in His completed work on their behalf (Acts 4:12; 16:31), God credits His righteousness to their account. On the cross God treated Jesus as if He had lived our lives with all our sin, so that God could then treat us as if we lived Christ's life with pure holiness." (John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, "Romans, vol. 2," Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003, 217.) This is the most amazing rags-to-riches story to be told in eternity. If you are a believer in Christ, it is your story.