

The Greatest Story Ever Told

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: Romans 3:19-28

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The Scripture which I have chosen for my message today declares the greatest story ever told. Now that is the title of this message, “The Greatest Story Ever Told.” I say it is the best news that you will ever here. And it is the most wonderful blessing. It contains the most wonderful blessing that you can possibly receive. But, you know, this greatest story ever told in Romans chapter three, if you will take your Bibles and turn to Romans chapter three, this greatest story ever told, this best news you ever heard, this riches blessing you can receive begins with bad news. That is the way it starts with very bad news, the worst news you ever heard, the worst, the very worst.

Listen to it, Romans 3:19. “Now we know. This is something we know. We know that what things soever the law of God says, I says to us, it says to us, all of us who are under the law, subject to the law. And it says, it says let every mouth be stopped and all the world become guilty before God.” That is the worst news you ever heard, the whole world is guilty before God. The whole world is accursed, under the cure of the law.

You know that’s the worst news that a fellow on trial in a courtroom can hear the jury say, “Guilty.” But this is worse than that because this is guilty before God, guilty before God.

I tell you David defines this guilt. He tells us what this guilt is in Psalm 51. They call this psalm the psalm of repentance and David is telling us exactly what this guilt, this awful, awful guilt is before God with which we are charged. First of all he says it is transgression. We are transgressors. We are trespassers, transgressors in acts, in deeds, in thoughts, in words. We are transgressors, transgressors.

Secondly, it is personal. He says, “Lord, forgive my transgressions and wash my iniquity, my iniquity. Cleanse me from my sin. It is personal. These sins are our sins. We can’t blame somebody else. We can’t blame our heritage or our ancestry or our parents or our environment. If the guilt is inside of us it didn’t come from the outside. It came from the inside. It is personal. It is my guilt. Wash my iniquity, my sin.

And, thirdly, he says it is against God, against God. He says, “Against thee and the only have I sinned. We. Don’t owe too many apologies to people, but I will tell you, we owe an apology to God. Against God that’s...our sin is against God.

And then he says it is with out excuse. I don't have any alibi he says. You are just. God, you are just when you condemn me. You are righteous when you judge me. I am guilty. I am a transgressor. My guilt is personal. It is against you and you...I am without excuse and you are just when you damn me and clear when you charge me because it si born in me. It is born in me.

He said, "I was shapen in iniquity. In sin my mother conceived me. I was brought forth from the womb speaking lies."

Now that is the problem. What the law says it says to everybody who is under the law and it says guilty before God. And then verse 20, the bad news continues in the next verse. "Therefore because we are in the condition that we are in by nature and by birth and by choice and by practice." The bad news continues in the next verse and it says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law and by the works of religion and by the morality and doing of the flesh nobody will be justified in God's sight, nobody, nobody. For by the law is the knowledge of sin."

One day the Lord's disciples asked him this question. They said, "Lord, who can be saved? Who then can be saved?"

And do you know what Christ replied? "With men it is impossible."

And that is what Paul is saying here because we are guilty before God. We are guilty before God therefore salvation is impossible by the deeds of the flesh and the works of the law. That is what verse 20 is declaring. He said, "With men it is impossible." But thank God with God all things are possible. God can save us. We can't save ourselves.

Look at that verse 20 again. Because we are guilty before God therefore guilt and sin being our nature and our state, by observing laws and doing good deeds we cannot be acquitted, we cannot be declared not guilty, we cannot be made holy, not in his sight. Now we may justify ourselves in the sight of people. And our Lord charged us with that. He said, "You are they which justify yourselves before men." But that which you approve of and that which you brag about is an abomination to God. So we may justify ourselves before men, but not before God, not in his sight because God looks on the heart.

Guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified. For by the law is the knowledge of sin. What does that mean? For by the law is the knowledge of sin?

Well, it means this. The law reveals my sin. The law condemns me. The law pronounces me guilty. The law exposes my sin. And therefore it can't possibly justify me. The law which charged me and condemned me cannot justify me.

But look at verse 21. Now here is where the good news begins, verse 21. Here...here begins the greatest story ever told. Now that is bad news, guilty before God. Therefore salvation impossible with men. By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified before

God because by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now wait a minute? Listen, right now, verse 21. “But now, but now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested being witnessed by the Word of God and by the prophets of God.”

Did you hear that? But now, right now this very day at this time right now the righteousness of God, the holiness of God...I am not talking about his own essential holiness. That...but there is a holiness which God has ordained. There is a righteousness which God has provided. There is a righteousness which almighty God has seen fit to perfect for sinners like you and me. They are...he is saying, “But now there is grace for the guilty. But now there is mercy for the miserable. But now there is holiness for the unholy. But now there is salvation for sinners.” And it is without the law. It is ours freely. It had to be without the law because we can’t obey the law. We never have been able to. We are not now. And we cannot perfectly obey God’s law so it has to be free. It has to be provided. It has to be outside ourselves. It has to be God given.

But he says it is true right now, grace for the guilty, mercy for the miserable, salvation for sinners. The righteousness of God is manifested, manifested. And it is witnessed, it is witnessed—now you remember this—throughout the Scriptures. It is said over and over again, let every word be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses. Even Christ our Lord said, “If I bear witness only of myself, if I am the only witness, my witness is not true.” But he said, “The Father bore witness of me. The Scriptures bear witness of me. The works that I do bear witness of me and John the Baptist of me.”

So here this righteousness of God which is available, which is provided, which is manifested is witnessed by whom? By the prophets, by the Word of God, by all who have gone before. It is declared by many witnesses. God spoke to the people by his prophets and they bore witness to this righteousness.

All right, look at verse 22. And this righteousness is the holiness of God without the law, that is, without my obedience to the law. I can’t keep God’s law perfectly. It has to be perfect to be accepted. The Lord God can’t accept anything that is not perfect. The reason he accepted Christ he said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Christ was a man who perfectly obeyed God and was perfect in the sight of God. But I can’t do that. You can’t either. So this righteousness is the holiness of God which is accomplished by Christ. It is accomplished by the faithful life of Jesus Christ.

May I illustrate that for you in this way? Our Lord and Jesus Christ is our Lord, he is God. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. Without controversy this is the mystery of godliness that God was manifest in the flesh. John one says, “In the beginning was the Word.” Verse 14 said, “The Word was made flesh.” John 1:1 says, “And the Word was with God and dwelt among us and the Word was God and we beheld his glory, the only begotten of the Father.”

Jesus Christ is God. But he became a man. He was born of a woman. He was not born of a man. He was not conceived by a man. He was conceived by the Holy Ghost that he might not partake of the sin of Adam, a sinful nature. He is God in human flesh. He is

the virgin's son. And Jesus Christ from the day he was born was without sin. He had no sinful nature. But all through his life he was under the law, under the law of the home, under the law of the state, under the law of his country, under the law of magistrates, under the law of the synagogue, under the law of God, under the Mosaic law, under the Levitical law. He was circumcised when he was eight days old and named Jesus. He came to the temple when he was an infant. His mother brought her sacrifices. He came to the temple when he was 12 to do obedience to Moses' law. And then he stood one day in the River Jordan. He came to John to be baptized of John and John looked at him and he said, "I bore witness. This is the Son of God."

The Father said to me, "Upon whom you see the Spirit descending in the form of a dove, that is the Son of God." He said, "I bore witness to that." And John said to him, "Lord, I have need to be baptized of thee. Comest thou to me?"

And our Lord replied, listen. "Suffer it to be so now for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness."

You see, Christ in the fulness of time made of a woman, made under the law that he might obey it in our place instead and give to us a perfect righteousness. And from his birth to his death all that he did on this earth was for our salvation to fulfill our righteousness and all perfect obedience and holiness for us so that we...now the righteousness of God is manifest being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by the faithfulness and obedience of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now listen to Romans five, listen carefully, verse 19. For by one man's disobedience, Adam, by one man's disobedience the many were made sinners. So by the obedience of one man, Jesus Christ shall the many be made righteous.

How important is that verse? That is this righteousness of God.

By the disobedience of one man, the many, many, many, many who came from his loins, who came from Adam and that is all of us, were made sinners. So by the obedience of one man, Jesus Christ, the many, Jew and Gentile, male, female, old and young bond and free who believe, are made righteous by his perfect life and by his substitutionary death.

For he was made sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made this righteousness of God in him. Do you see that? What the law saith it saith to them who are under the law that every mouth may be stopped and all this world become guilty. Therefore by the deeds of religion no flesh is going to be justified in his sight. But no, good news. The righteousness of God is revealed being witnessed by all the prophets that went before us, even the righteousness of God which is by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. For who is it for? To whom is this righteousness given? For whom is it intended? It is unto all and upon all them that believe him.

Do you believe him?

Paul said, "Wherefore, sirs, I believe God that it shall be exactly as he told me."

Abraham believed God. That's the...back yonder in Genesis chapter 15 when God took him out under the stars and said, "Count them."

He said, "I can't."

He said, "So shall your seed be of all nations."

And Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.

Now then this is not written for his sake alone, for the sake of Abraham alone that righteousness was imputed to him, but for our sakes also to whom this same righteousness, the righteousness of God, the very holiness of Abraham whom God called my friend. God said, "Abraham is my friend. I speak face to face and mouth to mouth with Abraham. He is my friend."

Why was he God's friend? He believed God. He believed God. And this righteousness was imputed to him, but it wasn't written for his sake alone. It was written for us to whom it shall be imputed if we believe on the name of the Son of God.

And the next verse says, "For there is no difference." There is no difference. That is in the Word of God several times. There is no difference. All have sinned and come short of glory of God. There is no difference between the Jew and the Gentile. There is no difference between male and female, old and young, learned or ignorant, prisoner or guard, bond or free. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

But here is the results of faith, believing God. Listen. Verse 24. So being justified freely, being... What does justified mean? Not guilty. We started this message off guilty before God. Justified means not guilty before God, not guilty in his sight. So we are justified. How? Freely. By grace, not by works. We are justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. He redeemed us. He redeemed us. He bought us back.

Now here is the very heart of this greatest story ever told. It is found here in verse 25 and 26, the heard of this. This is the centerpiece. This is the heart of it. Being justified, sanctified, redeemed, righteous freely by his grace through the redemption, through the life, through the blood, through the obedience through the sacrifice of my substitute Jesus Christ whom, whom God hath set forth, God set forth. He said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he sent me, he anointed me, he ordained me, he set me forth. God from the beginning has set forth his Son, the man Christ Jesus called the Christ, called the Messiah, called the desire of all nations. He has set him forth openly, publicly, conspicuously and the first announcement is in Genesis 3:15 after Adam and Eve fell. God said this to the serpent. He said, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, between thy seed and her seed, the woman's seed, the virgin's son. You will bruise his heel, but he will crush your head. That's the first announcement. God set forth in that dark day with

Christ the light, in that day of death, Christ the light and the life, in that day of helplessness, Christ our hope. That's right.

And then God sent him forth in prophecy all throughout the Scriptures, a prophet like Moses, a priest like Melchizedek, a king like David, a serpent lifted up, a rock smitten, a Passover Lamb. He set him forth in prophecy in picture openly, publicly conspicuously throughout the whole Old Testament. That rock was Christ.

When Moses smote that rock and the water came out and gave refreshing water to all that multitude of people that rock was Christ. That Passover Lamb was Christ. God sent him forth in prophecy and picture, in pattern, in type, in promise. But one day he sent him forth in person. He was in the world and the world knew him not and the world was made by him. He came unto his own and his own received him not.

We saw him and beheld his glory. God set him forth. One day the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and lived here for 33 and a half years walking on this earth before he was crucified. God sent him forth.

Now listen. To be a propitiation, a propitiation. What is the word propitiation? To reconcile, to appease, to put away sin. God sent him forth as a propitiation, as a mercy seat as a sin offering through faith in his blood to declare God's righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God. And do you know? Perhaps one of the best pictures of Christ and most oft used pictures of Christ is a lamb, a lamb. He is called the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world. And in Genesis four the lamb is typified. Abel came to worship God and slew a lamb, put the blood on the offering, on the altar.

Cain came, didn't bring a lamb and God rejected his fruits and vegetables and had respect to Abel's offering. There is the lamb typified. And then the lamb was prophesied. Abraham, on the way up the mountain when his son Isaac asked him, "Where is the lamb?" He said, "My son, God will provide himself a lamb. God will provide a lamb."

And then the lamb's blood was applied. Down there in Egypt they put the blood on the door, slew a lamb, put the blood on the door and God said, "When I see the blood I will pass over you."

And then in Isaiah 53 the Lamb is personified. It is going to be a man, a man who will grow up among us as a root out of a dry ground, as a tender plant and we see him. There is no beauty we should desire him. He will be despised of men, acquainted with grief, a man of sorrows. But will be wounded for our transgressions and he will be bruised for our iniquities and the chastisement of our peace will be upon him and he will be led as a lamb to the slaughter. He opens not his mouth, but voluntarily, freely dies for his people. That is the lamb personified. And then one day John the Baptist the last Old Testament prophet stood with two of his friends and Jesus Christ walked by and John the Baptist identified him. He had been typified. He had been prophesied. He had been blood ap-

plied. He had been personified. And now he is identified. And John said, "There he is, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

And then he was crucified. Our lamb was slain. His blood was shed. And he, as our great high priest went not into the tabernacle made with hands, but into heaven itself, not with the blood of animals, but with his own precious blood and put it on the mercy seat of God and put away all our sin. God sent him forth to be a propitiation, a mercy seat, a covering, a reconciler, an appeaser.

And then we have the Lamb glorified. John wrote on the isle of Patmos, "And behold in the midst of the throne stood a Lamb, stood a Lamb in the middle of the throne as it had been slain. And they fell down before the Lamb. All the host of heaven fell down before the Lamb, put their trophies at his feet and their crowns at his feet and they cried. They sung a new song. Thou art worthy for thou wast slain and thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every tribe, kindred, nation and tongue under heaven. Oh, behold the Lamb of God.

Let me say in closing this message, "The Greatest Story Ever Told," I declare at this time God's holiness. He will not change. Our sin, we can't change. But almighty God that he might be just and justifier and have a people like his Son sent his Son into the world to redeem a host of people and they will believe and they will come.

And then he said in verse 27, "Where is boasting then? Who has got anything to brag about? It is excluded. By what law? By the law of works? No, sir. By the law of faith." Therefore, verse 28. Paul says, "I conclude. I conclude that a man is justified by faith and not by the works of the law."

There is way. It is the way of the cross and it is the way of faith. And it is a sure way, by the grace of God.

Now, I have two messages on this tape. This message here, "The Greatest Story Ever Told." The greatest story, how God can be just and justify the ungodly. And the message I preached last week. If you would like to have this tape with both messages, if you will write to us, send two dollars, you can get the address on the screen and write us. We will send it just as quickly as possible and pray that it will be a blessing to you.

Join us next Sunday at this same time. Until then I bid you a very pleasant good day.