

# IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS

## A SERMON

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“The blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputes righteousness without works.” Romans 4:6

I WISH, if it be the Lord's will, it was in the power of each of you to say, I am that man to whom the Lord “imputes righteousness;” and those of you that cannot say so, if you have a desire to say so, that is something towards it. And you will at once see that the first important feature of our text is to point out the person, the man; “the blessedness of *the man* to whom the Lord imputes righteousness without works.” Let this be once established; and if you should this morning leave the sanctuary, leave this house of prayer, with a comfortable hope in your soul that you are the person to whom the work of Christ is imputed, to whose account that work in the Holy Scriptures and in the High Court of Heaven is eternally assigned, then I am sure you will not go away altogether miserable, you will not go away altogether uncomfortable; you will not go away and say, I almost wish I had not come; for although it is a subject upon which we have dwelt, and shall dwell to all eternity, yet its every day importance makes it acceptable, its everlasting importance makes it always acceptable; for in no other way can the blessed God look with approbation upon us, in no other way can the Lord consistently with his attributes be on our side; in no other way can we live in safety; in no other way can we die in peace; in no other way can we rise prepared for heaven; in no other way can we have possession of that life, that rest, that kingdom, and that glory which the Lord has for his people.

The text then appears before us in a sort of four-square form. Here is, first *the object*; that is, man; “The blessedness of *the man*;” the man is the object. “To whom the Lord imputes righteousness without works;” here is secondly, *the act*; the imputation of righteousness without works. Here is thirdly, *the author*: God imputes righteousness without works. Here is fourthly, *the end* blessedness; that is the great end that is to be understood.

FIRST: I notice then first THE OBJECT to whom this righteousness is imputed, man; “the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord imputes righteousness without works.” I shall find this man in the preceding verse; and I shall find him also in the 16th verse of this chapter; and I shall find him also at the end of the chapter; and I shall find him also in several other places. And may it be your lot, that love his blessed name to follow me this morning, and to feel that you are brought

into that path of faith in Christ, that path of experimental acquaintance with him; for if we are justified and have peace with God, it must be by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I notice then, first, *the man*. The man to whom the Lord imputes righteousness is the man that is brought to feel his need of this, deeply feel his need of it, and to be sunk into self-despair without it. Hence the preceding verse represents the man thus, "Now to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." And therefore, the man to whom the Lord imputes righteousness without works is the man that is altogether ungodly and yet at the same time, one of the godliest men under the canopy of heaven. Hence David, in the Psalm from which our text is taken, for this is a quotation from the 32nd Psalm; the man to whom the Lord imputes righteousness without works is there called a godly man; "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto you in a time when you may be found." But first, we have to notice the man as he is in his own eyes, an ungodly man. Now to him that works not. What is the reason he does not work? Why, because he has found out that there is no rule, there is no law by which he can by any works that he can do obtain the mercy of God; and he consequently falls back in self-despair, and feels that if he be not saved, be not justified freely by the grace of God, he cannot be justified at all. Let us look at the description of this man in the 103rd Psalm. David there speaks of six successive evils from which he was delivered. Let me just remind you of these evils; and let us see as we go along if each of us can say that is just my state, that is just what I am. David had realized deliverance from these evils; and therefore, he glories in the Lord accordingly. But we have to notice in this part of our subject these evils. The first is that of sin: "He forgives all my iniquities." That is all he possessed, he was a sinner, nothing but a sinner. Now I must know whether I know enough of God's holy and just law, whether I know enough of my own heart, and whether I know anything of the truth of the apostle's words when he says, "I am carnal, sold under sin;" I must know whether I know enough of myself as a sinner to stand before a heart searching God and say, O Lord, you know that I am now, though I once was not, conscious that I have nothing but sin to call my own; I am a sinner, and nothing but a sinner, originally in Adam, in my heart, and nature, and lip, and life, I am but a sinner. Now, "to him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly;" Then here is an ungodliness to be justified from, to be exempted from; but there is not only ungodliness to be exempted from. Again, there is also *disease*. David says, "He heals my diseases." Then there are diseases to be healed. Oh, what a diseased state the soul is in, not only by nature; but when quickened by grace, the Lord wounds the heart, wounds the conscience; hence the truth of that description, "The whole head is sick, the whole heart is faint: there is no part sound, but full of wounds, and bruises and putrefying sores, from the crown of the head unto the sole of the foot." Why, the poor creature says, what am I to do? I have not a vestige of holiness; the law is perfectly holy, and I am as unholy as that is holy, as unrighteous as that is righteous, as ungodly as that is godly, and as false as that is true; and a poor diseased loathsome creature! What say you to this my friend? And then the next thing is that of *destruction*. David says, "And redeems my life from destruction." And so, it is that we are destroyed in the first Adam. Israel of old destroyed itself by apostasy. Many quote that Scripture, "O Israel, you have destroyed yourself," as expressive of our state by the fall, but it is not there applied to our state by the fall; it there refers to Israel having destroyed itself nationally by its apostasy from God. When we therefore, come to that destruction that we are under by the fall, it is a greater destruction that is there referred to. That was a mere temporal destruction, destroying themselves as a nation; but the destruction that we have in and by the fall of Adam is an everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. Now have we then been brought to see this so as to say amen to it? And though the experience of one be much deeper in this matter than that of another, yet if we

know enough of this to reconcile us to the gospel and make us seek the Lord, and make us long after the Lord, and make us look to the Lord, if not with so much intensity of those that have deeper experience, yet remember it is written that there is One that “will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.” seek the Lord, then and we shall be able to appreciate the importance and blessing of our text. Again, the next thing is that of *degradation*. David says, “He crowns you with loving-kindness and tender mercies.” That implies that without that loving kindness and mercy, he is under degradation. And what a state of degradation is that to be under, to be under sin, under Satan, under the curse, and under death, eternal degradation. My hearer, can you say, I am that poor iniquitous creature; I am that poor destroyed, lost sinner; I am a poor degraded worm? If you can set your seal to that, I am sure you will loathe yourself in your own sight. And then the next thing is that of *privation*. David says, “He satisfies my mouth with good things;” implying that without this special mercy of the Lord there was privation. And so, it is, that we are utterly hopeless, helpless, under privation; there is not a promise in all the Scriptures to which we have any natural right; or to which we can acquire any legal right; there is not a promise in all the Scriptures that we can by any works whatever attain unto. We must be brought to know our utter destitution, and that nothing but grace can give us a name among the people of God. And then the last thing in that 103<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is *nudation and helplessness*. “Your youth is renewed like the eagles;” referring to the eagle when it molts. And so, it is with the sinner; he is in a stripped state; he is in a poor, wretched, naked state; and as the eagle is, faint and helpless, when the feathers of its mighty wings are gone, so is the poor sinner. As Watts rightly says,

“He can neither fly nor go  
To reach eternal things.”

“To him that works not.” Why, he is altogether a sinner; whatever he does is sinful; he is altogether diseased, and whatever he touches he as it were defiles; he is nothing by nature, but a vessel fitted to destruction; he is poor and destitute of anything that is holy, just or good; he is stripped and helpless. Well then, “To him that works not.” Can you say, that is me, Lord; for there is not a single commandment of the ten that I can by nature conform to? Well then, “To him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Thus, I get the man. Are you the man? Oh, say you, I want to go further than that. But have you got as far as that? There are a great many that have got a great deal farther than that, and yet have never come so far as that. I want the beginning to be right; for if this conviction, if this sight and sense of what you are be not at the foundation, be not the groundwork, if it does not rest upon that, if it does not begin there then you are not at all, prepared for the mercy of the blessed God. Bless the Lord, then, that we can come in this way, “To him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly.” Well now, what sort of an exemption must it be, if you are exempted from all this? Well, you say, it must be a gracious exemption; I am satisfied of it. It must be of grace in its origin, it must be of grace in its mediation, it must be of grace in its manifestation, in its continuation, in its glorification. “Justified freely, by his grace,” I am conscious of it; that is the man. “The blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputes righteousness without works.”

He justifies from that which is ungodly by imputing unto them that which is godly; and makes them godly by making Christ unto them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and eternal redemption. We shall find this man again in the 16th verse; “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace.” Ah, say you, that’s it; I am that poor, lost creature, a free-will gospel will only be a

mockery to me, a snare, a delusion; a duty-faith gospel to me would be a suicidal gospel; it contradicts itself; that gospel is a murderer, and no murderer has eternal life; and therefore, I shall never find it there. But "It is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end that the promise might be sure." Oh, says the poor lost sinner, that is what I want; I want a gospel of certainty; I want a covenant of certainty; I want a God of certainty; I want a Christ of certainty; I want a testimony of certainty; I want a promise of certainty; I want the gospel of good old father Abraham; where God, as he could swear by no greater, swore by himself. How wonderful a thing that our Maker, our Creator, should so concentrate his heart, his attributes, his counsels, his eternal delights, on the welfare of man, as to reveal himself in that wondrous way, to bind himself, even his very being, in an immutable oath; he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself.

But I will go after this man again; after giving you two likenesses of him; one his sinner-ship likeness, and the other his faith likeness. I will present him again to you. You see he is becoming a high doctrine man; he is getting up the hill; he is getting into the certainty of God's truth. And now another likeness of him, which we shall find towards the end of the chapter; where the apostle assures us that this righteousness being imputed unto Abraham, the record of it was not for Abraham alone, but for us also, "If we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." Now, what has he (God the Father) done? Why, one thing he has done is, whether you believe it or not, he has from all eternity taken notice of a certain people; taken such notice of them that he has given them to his dear Son; "Elect according to the fore-knowledge of God the Father;" and the same people He has predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son. My text shows what that conformity is, it is the reception of Christ's righteousness, constituting us righteous in him. The same persons that he chose before the world was, and that he gave eternally to Christ, that they might be eternally safe, the same persons he also called. Did they come? It looks like it; for whom he called, he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified. Therefore, to believe on him is to believe on him in his eternal counsels and settlements. But I am very anxious about this man; for if I get the wrong man, I shall make dreadful work of it; I am anxious to get the right man into the right place. Do you feel you are a sinner? Do you believe in the certainty of God's truth? Do you believe on God the Father with that faith that works love to that same God? If so, you are the man.

Shall I bring two or three instances of those to whom God imputes righteousness without works? There was one that came before God conscious that he was ungodly, conscious of what he was, came before God with an excellent sacrifice, the spotless, typical lamb; and he loved the testimony of God concerning the seed of the woman undertaking to bruise the serpent's head. God knows the heart; he knows when you plead in the Savior's name, whether you do it really or not; he knows whether you come in real harmony with his counsels, in harmony with the perfection of his dear Son; he knew that was the case with Abel, and he had respect to him and to his sacrifice; and by the lamb he obtained witness that he was righteous. That is the man, coming in a Savior's name. Enoch was another of these men to whom God imputed righteousness without works: "He walked with God." There is but one way of pleasing God, and that is by the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ becomes your way, when his righteousness becomes the end of the law to you, the end of your sin to you, then you please the Lord, then you have power with God, and that is the way that Enoch walked with God, by faith. Noah was another of these men. He put a negative upon all the world; joined with God's word to declare that there was none righteous, no, not one; all were under sin; he became a believer in God's yea and amen promise; a man to whom

righteousness was imputed without works. Need I say that our father Abraham was one? There is not in the whole of the Old Testament, a more delightful scripture than that in Genesis 15. The Lord said to Abraham, "Look now towards heaven, and tell the stars, if you are able to number them and he said unto him, so shall your seed be." First, numerically, cannot number them. Secondly, as these stars shine, so shall your seed; as these stars are beyond the reach of man, so shall your seed be; as these stars are there by creative power, independent of man, so shall your seed be; as these stars move each in its orbit, according to divine ordination, so shall your seed be; as no man can stop their progress, break their order, interfere with their harmony, so shall your seed be; as they are altogether beyond the reach of man, so shall your seed be; and as these stars are the wonder of many, so shall your seed be; and as these stars are high, so shall your seed be. Do you believe this, Abraham? He did; he believed these stars, not only in their number, but in the respects, I have stated, were a figure of his spiritual offspring. Anything wrong in this? No. Christ is the Bright and Morning Star; and they are ordained to be conformed to his image; and therefore, if Christ be bright, they shall be bright too; if he go down no more, they shall go down no more; they went down in the first Adam, but they cannot go down in the second Adam; and as it is an eternal morning with Christ, night is gone and gone forever; so it is with them; as Christ shall never cease to shine, one with Jesus, by eternal union one! You are the man! Again, what hand had the stars in their own formation? So, shall your seed be. What hand had the stars in arranging, themselves in their present orbits? None at all. What hand had the stars in fixing upon the rapidity of their progression, whether they should go 68,000 miles an hour, or 68,000,000 miles an hour? What hand had the stars in, arranging themselves in their several distances from the sun? Why is one so near the sun, and the other so far off? Why does one run round the sun in three months, and the other takes sixty years? They had no hand in it. So, shall your seed be, just what God will bring you to. Perhaps sin, and the devil, and circumstances, toss you about like a feather before the wind; you are the man that will stand for the truth like an iron pillar, like a brazen wall, like a defended city, for he feels that nothing else will do, he has found all else fail him. You may depend upon it, we all need salting, we all need brining well; you may depend upon it, the Lord will put a rod steeped in brine upon us; it is a good thing to thrash away error, and leave not a vestige of creature confidence, but bring us down low at the footstool of his mercy. And, oh! what must be the love that such people have to God! What must be the service wherewith they serve him? who,

"saw them ruined in the fall,  
Yet loved them notwithstanding all."

If then you can go with me in these respects which I have mentioned, you are the man.

Secondly: I will notice now: THE ACT. "The blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness." "Imputes righteousness." Now to impute, as you are aware, means to set to the account of; and the word righteousness here certainly will mean the whole of the mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are two ideas in that of justification; the first idea in the matter of justification is that of exemption; exempting from condemnation, exempting from any penalties whatever that we are under. Hence you will find in the very next chapter, we are said to be justified by the blood of Christ. Take now the two ideas, exemption, that is one idea of justification. Hence, we are said to be justified from all things. There never was, and there never can be a sin, nor a curse, nor a penalty, from which we are not in this way exempted. And this idea will take in the whole of the Savior's work; "justified by his blood" that is, as the Israelites were exempted from

the angel of death, by the Paschal Lamb, the blood of the Lamb; so now we are exempted from the penalties of sin by the blood of the Lamb. The Lord preserve us from a presumptuous spirit, this is what we are in danger of here. When Satan sees we are got into such a glorious position, entire exemption by the blood of Jesus, by the work of Christ, from all sin and all penalty, then Satan will try to get us into a presumptuous spirit, and to make us despise all godly exercise, godly doubts and fears, as though they were not wholesome admonitions within us, to stir us up and preserve us. A great many I have heard talk very big words; but when they came into trouble, I have found that they can doubt and fear like the rest of us. So, I say, the Lord keep us on the one hand from a legal bias, and on the other hand from a presumptuous spirit. Justification then will mean exemption; "no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Then the second idea is that of being constituted righteous; exemption first, and then constituted righteous, even as he is righteous, Christ was righteous naturally; we are made righteous by his righteousness. And you will find everywhere in the Scriptures, in the Old and New Testament, that reigning grace, eternal glory, and justifying righteousness, are inseparably placed together.

Thirdly: But let us look thirdly at THE AUTHOR, God; it is God that does it. How does he do it? First in his word. The kingdom that we have recently dwelt upon belongs to character; and the Lord will constitute his people, those he intends to save, the character that shall answer to his own description, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom." And therefore, he does it in his holy word. And then he does it also by the work of the Holy Spirit, endearing the Lord to us by this. I can love God the Father only as I meet him on this ground; I can love the blessed Spirit only as I meet him there; I can love the Bible only as I see it there; nowhere else. The Holy Spirit does make us love God in this way. It takes a great deal to make a poor sinner love God; we know how many trying circumstances come that make us rebel and have hard thoughts of God. Satan was in the secret, he knew Job's liability as a sinner; "He will curse you to your face;" and so Job would have done too, but grace ruled in his heart, and though he cursed the day of his birth, he could not curse the truth, could not curse God. But Satan well knew that Job had wickedness enough in his heart to bring up a thousand curses against the Eternal God, Satan knew this, and knew it well. It takes a great deal to make a sinner love God. Since I have been brought to know God so as to love him, I know the hard thoughts I have had of him in my heart; thoughts I dare not dwell upon. I wonder even now, when I think of some of the hard thoughts that I had against God; and when in addition to this a false gospel is brought in, it rather confirms me in this enmity against him than not. But when I find Christ's righteousness imputed to me by the blessed God himself, that God sets it to my account, and if he had not intended it for me, he would not have revealed it to me; "Blessed are your eyes, for they see" then I cannot but love him. God is on our side according to this righteousness; he deals with us according to this righteousness; he deals with us according to this righteousness; and he will take care of us according to this righteousness; Christ walks with us according to this righteousness, and the Holy Spirit walks with us according to this righteousness. All my hope personally, and all my hope ministerially, is founded on this one truth, that of righteousness imputed without works, without the works of the law, or any works whatever. Works may follow, and works will follow too, to glorify God; but no works can have any hand in this great matter of Christ's righteousness imputed unto us. Now it is God that does it. Then if he has done it, you cannot undo it, sin cannot undo it, Satan cannot undo it, man cannot undo it, the world cannot undo it, enemies cannot undo it, friends cannot undo it, life cannot undo it, death cannot undo it, eternity cannot undo it; it is done, and done for ever.

Fourthly: Now let me in conclusion notice the BLESSEDNESS OF THE MAN. The blessedness of the man will lie in these three things; first, *in entire abolition of sin*: secondly, *in the care the Lord will take of that man*: and thirdly, *the ultimate destiny to which he shall come*. “Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven.” “If you are a believer, your sins are forgiven.” In the court of heaven and in God’s word declaratively; and if they are not yet forgiven in your heart and conscience, if you have not yet experienced it, you will do so. “And whose sin is covered.” How is it covered? Where there is no law, there is no transgression. Just as the two tables of the law were put into the ark, and the mercy seat covered the ark, so that the tables of the law, that could speak on Sinai, were quiet beneath the mercy seat, quiet to all eternity; so Christ’s sacrifice, the mercy seat, covers the law; our sins are thereby covered, gone, and gone forever, There are some people that could not live if they didn’t task other people with their old faults a bit; some are amazingly fond of it; I always like to make my escape with all my might from such people; I think of all disagreeable beings there are none like them. If there is anything, they can recollect that occurred ten or twenty years ago, it does their stomachs better than a sheep does a wolf starving for food. Don’t listen to such people; there is not much of the Christian about them, not much godliness. I will tell you this, every one of you, if you are really conscious of God’s infinite mercy in covering your sins you may depend upon it there will be a corresponding feeling on your part towards others; “For if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” So true is it, that the mercy of the Lord is that that surpasses everything else. David knew this when he said, “Let me not fall into the hands of man.” God’s order of things, then, is to forgive, and cover, and not to impute blame. “He shall present you without blame.” I like that feature of the gospel uncommonly well, without blame. What, won’t the Lord’s people be blamed for what they have done? No, sir, Jesus Christ bore the blame for ever, would have borne it forever if he had not put an end to it; the blame is gone, and gone forever. This is one part of the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness without works.

The second part is the care the Lord will take of him. The Lord says, “I will instruct you in the way you should go;” instruct you, teach you in the way you should go; “I will guide you with my eye.” Now notice the care he takes, “Be you not as the horse, or as the mule;” that is, the wild horse or the wild mule, I should think; “which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto you.” The horse, when it is caught, will as soon run upon its owner and trample him down as any other person; and the stupid mule would as soon kick its owner, or trample on him as any other person; and therefore, the meaning is that the people of God shall have an understanding; they shall not trample upon the Son of God, they shall not trample upon his truth, they shall not put under foot his blessed testimony, they shall not do so, he will take care of them, guide them with his eye, bless them with understanding, and preserve them from treading down his truth.

Then the last is the ultimate destiny to which he shall come. The last verse of the 32nd Psalm hints what is their destiny, “Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, you righteous, and shout for joy, all you that are upright in heart!” there is the climax, there is the gladness, the joy and the shouting. Let me mention two or three of the occasions of this rejoicing, and then I close. Entire freedom from sin. Who gives the first shout of triumph in that, think you? The people? No, God himself is more forward to rejoice in the liberty which Christians enjoy than we ourselves. “He has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, nor seen perverseness in Israel; the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them.” Why, it is Christ that shouts! he rejoices that there is no iniquity to behold,

no perverseness to find, it is gone forever. They also rejoice in their security, "Let the inhabitants of the rock sing, let them shout from the tops of the mountains," They shall also rejoice in seeing the perfection of the building, "He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shouting, crying grace, grace unto it;" They shall also rejoice at the last great day, for "the redeemed of the Lord shall come with singing unto Zion;" And as that redemption is eternal, it will keep up the eternity of their joy, "Everlasting joy shall be unto them!"

Thus, then I hope and trust many of you, I hope each of you, can say, I am the man; I do know something of this life and of this hope. And if so, the Lord is on your side.