

Good Friday

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yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.
⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.

¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin,
he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper.
(Isaiah 53:4-5, 10. NRSV)

⁴⁷ So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying,
“Certainly this was a righteous Man!”
(Luke 23:47. NKJV)

Certainly This Was A Righteous Man

April 6th, 2012

Luke 23:1-56

Romans 5:12-21

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Introduction:

This morning is Good Friday and our subject on this Holy Day is the cross of Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthians:

²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. (1 Corinthians 1:2. NKJV)

Paul had ministered in Corinth for 18 months and during that time he could think of nothing else to preach or teach or talk about other than Jesus Christ on the cross. The cross is the centre of the Bible – the whole Old Testament looks forward to it and all the Gospels reach their climax upon it and all of the narratives and letters that follow it reflect upon it. The cross is the centre of the Gospel which is the good news of what God has done in Jesus Christ. We have to understand the cross or nothing else in the Bible will make any sense at all. All manner of heresies and blasphemies are born in the loss of the cross. So what happened that day at Golgotha?

This morning the worship team read for us Luke's narrative of the cross event. My intention is not to parse his words but rather to pull back from his story and ask some forest level questions. Why did Luke tell this story and what did he think that it meant? Historians tell us that Luke wrote his Gospel for the Apostle Paul and his ministry among the Gentiles. And so Paul may have read some early version of this very story to churches in Corinth or Ephesus or Phillippi before preaching to them on the meaning of the cross.

Last year on Good Friday we introduced a big word that is an important lens for our contemplation of the cross: "propitiation". We met that word in Romans 3:21-25, a passage Martin Luther called the holy centre of the Gospel. The word means "to make God favourable or joyous". Propitiation is one of the words the Apostle Paul used to describe what happened on the cross. On the cross Jesus made it possible for God to be favourably disposed towards all those who have faith in Christ. Prior to the cross we were enemies of God, rebels who had not laid down arms, God was disposed in wrath towards us.

One of the things we struggle to understand is how God can be loving and wrathful at the same time. Part of the problem is that we see God through the lens of how we are loving and how we are angry. But both human love and human anger are fallen. Human love is too often distorted by lust, human anger is too often driven by pettiness, fear and pride. God's anger is not explosive, neither is it emotional or inebriating as though God loses control of himself and chases his children around the cosmos with his wooden spoon. That may be how we are angry but it is not how HE is angry. Leon Morris in his landmark book *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* puts it this way:

The point of all this is that the biblical writers habitually use for the divine wrath a word which denotes not so much a sudden flaring up of passion which is soon over, as a strong and settled opposition to all that is evil arising out of God's very nature. (Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*; p.180)

In the same way that the radiation of the sun is naturally and in a settled way hostile to the soft flesh of exposed human skin, so God's holiness is naturally and in a settled way hostile to the pride, idolatry and rebelliousness of fallen human beings. That's why the presence of God in the garden is hidden from sinful man by a flaming sword. If fallen man, sons and daughters of Adam were to waltz into the presence of God unprepared we would be as surely consumed as if we took

a swan-dive into the seething, swirling surface of the sun. Propitiation was the work that made God joyously and favourably and hospitably inclined towards us. We talked about that last year.

This year I want to introduce another complicated, but very useful word that is very much related to last year's word. It is the word "imputation". Open your Bibles to Romans 5:8. Here the Apostle Paul is connecting some HUGE doctrines of the cross and moving from one to another; at the speed of thought, he moves from justification, to substitution to propitiation to reconciliation to imputation. Each of those concepts has given birth to LIBRARIES of Christian writing and more sermons than we could name in this hour, let alone read. We'll just breeze through his preamble and then we will settle into his discussion of imputation once he gets to verses 12 and following:

⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be **saved from wrath** through Him.

¹⁰For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

¹¹And not only *that*, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

¹²Therefore, just as **through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin**, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—

¹³(For until the law sin was in the world, **but sin is not imputed when there is no law**.

¹⁴**Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses**, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

¹⁵But **the free gift is not like the offense**. For if by the one man's offense many died, **much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many**.

¹⁶And the gift *is* not like *that which came* through the one who sinned. For the judgment *which came* from one *offense resulted* in condemnation, but **the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification**.

¹⁷For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of **the gift of righteousness will reign in life** through the One, Jesus Christ.)

¹⁸Therefore, as through one man's offense **judgment came to all men**, resulting in condemnation, **even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life**.

¹⁹For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also **by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous**.

²⁰Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,

²¹so that as sin reigned in death, even so **grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord**. (Romans 5:8-21. NKJV)

Let me pull this apart for you and bring this heavenly truth down to street level. The word "imputation" is actually an easy word to understand, there is a little built in memory device. Do you see the word "put" in there? Everybody knows what put means. You can put something over here or you can put it over there; that's a really basic English word. Well the Greek word for imputation is also a fancy sounding word with a really simple word buried inside of it. There are two related words that are usually used for imputation in the Bible. The first is the Greek

word *logizomai* and the second is the word *ellegeo*. There is a simple little word inside there that everybody knows; the word “log”. Not “log” like log cabin but log as in a log book or an account or a ledger. The Greek word *logizomai* simply means to “put in the account” or to “put into the log”. It means to have something deposited or accounted to your credit. In modern terms, imagine you went to the bank to check your balance and you were expecting your balance to read \$22 and 57 cents but instead when you got your statement it read 5 BILLION dollars. You would know that you have been the recipient of some very wonderful imputation. Somebody has PUT INTO YOUR ACCOUNT something you could never have earned in a dozen lifetimes. That is imputation. Put into your LOG.

This by the way is how salvation in the Bible has ALWAYS worked, Old Testament and New. My kids know this because one of the first verses that our kids memorize is Genesis 15:6 which says, speaking about Abraham:

“And he believed in the LORD, and **He accounted it** to him for righteousness. (NKJV)

The Greek word in the Greek translation of the Old Testament that is translated here as “he accounted it” is *logizomai*. Imputation was how people got saved in Abraham’s day and it is how people get saved today.

Now that you feel a little more familiar with this term, let me show you the three parts of imputation that the Apostle Paul is talking about in Romans 5 as he reflects upon the cross event. There are three “puts” that we need to understand.

Imputation In Three Parts

1. Adam’s sin is PUT on us

The first “put” is when Adam’s sin is “put” on us, or you might say when Adam’s sin is credited to our account. Paul says:

¹²Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—

The Bible says that when Adam sinned a genetic disease entered the human race that is UNIVERSAL in its infection rate. Everybody born from Adam is tainted by this disease. Think of sin as being like a genetically transmitted disease that passes through the father; which has a little something to do with the theological necessity of the virgin birth, but that is a whole other story. The point that Paul is making is that Adam passes on two types of sin to all his progeny. Paul makes a distinction in the next verse between what scholars call original sin and actual sin. Look at verses 13-14:

¹³(For until the law sin was in the world, **but sin is not imputed when there is no law.**

¹⁴**Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses,** even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.

There was no LAW technically before Moses so no one could commit ACTUAL sin which is transgression of the law, yet still everybody died, why is that? Because they were also sinners by nature! They were born with a broken compass and so even before they could walk they were pointed in the wrong direction. This distinction is very important when we talk about children. Children cannot commit actual sin until they are old enough to understand the law of God but they are sinners by nature from the womb. Before they can walk they are already pointing in the wrong direction, that's why the Bible says that evil is bound up in the heart of a child, that's why David said:

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. (Psalm 51:5. NKJV)

He wasn't saying that it was a sin for his mother and father to have had sexual intercourse, he is saying that before he even came out of the womb he was leaning in the wrong direction! How many of you know what I am talking about even before you understood this complicated theology? How many people have come to the conclusion that their natural born instincts and tendencies are somehow tragically flawed and that if you listen to your instincts and follow your passions you are going to end up face down in the ditch? We are born leaning in the wrong direction and as soon as we can walk we find ourselves charging head long into ruin. The Bible says that not only are we born leaning in the wrong direction we are also born fighting for the wrong army. We were born into a long standing war between sinful man and holy God and by the time we are old enough to even intelligently ask what side we want to be on in this war we have already committed terrible atrocities against our Creator God. We are born fighting Adam's

war and we are born stained in Adam's blood. When a baby comes out of the womb what is he covered in? Blood. That's what Paul is saying here, we are born with a negative balance in our account that we cannot ever pay off.

That is the first type of imputation that Paul is talking about here. We are born with debts PUT to our account that we can't pay. By the way that is why in one version of the Lord's Prayer we pray: "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors". That's not talking about credit card debt that's talking about moral debt inherited from Adam.

2. Our sin is PUT on Christ

The second put that Paul is talking about is the one where our sins are PUT on Christ's account. This is the idea we began talking about last Sunday when Christ prayed in the garden. It wasn't the prospect of death that caused Jesus so much agony it was the prospect of having the sins of the world poured down his throat upon the cross and facing there the full fury of God's wrath against those sins. Jesus was baptised in idolatry, pornography, adultery, theft, murder, witchcraft, drug abuse, child abuse, rape and every despicable sin you can think of upon the cross. He drank the sewer of human iniquity down to the dregs. The whole weight of sin was transferred entirely to his account and God crushed him to death for it. That is what the Old Testament prophets knew had to happen:

⁴ Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. (Isaiah 53:4-5. NRSV)

That is what Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians when he says:

²¹For **He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us**, (2 Corinthians 5:21a. NKJV)

Paul has already made this point by the time he gets to the passage we read in Romans 5, let me just go back a paragraph or two and show you in Romans 4 where he says:

It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,
²⁵**who was delivered up because of our offenses**, and was raised because of our justification. (Romans 4:24-25. NKJV)

Jesus died on the cross not bearing his own sins, but bearing ours. God took the sin log of every elect person who has ever lived or will ever lived and he cut and pasted all of those sins from our account TO HIS ACCOUNT and then he punished those sins by putting Jesus to death upon the cross. When Jesus said on the cross:

“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”^e (Mark 15:34. NKJV)

He wasn't just quoting his favourite Scripture verse there, he was expressing what he felt as the full force of God's unmixed hatred for sin turned upon him and fell upon his person. In that moment Jesus lived for us the experience of God's settled hatred for sin. In that moment Jesus understood in an experiential way that God's unleashed judgement on sin is terrible. When God unleashes his fury against sin, when he ceases to restrain that which is his natural antagonism towards rebellion and sin it is a form of hatred. God is love and God is holy and therefore God hates. God warned of this many times in the Bible. In your readings in the next two weeks or so you will encounter in Leviticus where God says that when I unleash my punishment against your sin and idolatry:

My soul shall abhor you. (Leviticus 26:30. NKJV)

There is a ridiculous notion out there that God hates the sin but loves the sinner but that is simply not true. You wear your sin like a garment that leaches its venom into your skin until the two are indistinguishable. That's why Jude the brother of the Lord said that when trying to evangelize and save persistently sinful people you have to be careful and even fearful:

²²And on some have compassion, ^amaking a distinction;

²³but others **save with fear**, pulling *them* out of the ^afire, **hating even the garment defiled by the flesh**. (Jude 1:22-23. NKJV)

That's an idiom for which there is no direct English equivalent but you don't need a seminary degree to get the gist of that do you? Jude is saying that some people have been sinning so long and so hard that there is no way to tell where the sin stops and they start. Like a stinky, fetid robe that has stained their very skin you need to handle them with rubber gloves and reach out to them

in fear lest you yourself are infected. That's how the Bible talks about sin. Now imagine trying to give a Holy God a hug wearing those putrid, fetid, disgusting clothes. No way. God's holiness would burn you before you got even close, our God is a consuming fire! But here is what the Bible says, God took all of those clothes and he hung them on Jesus on the cross. He took your filthy sewer stained rags and Jesus wore them willingly on our behalf and God treated Jesus that day as if those sins were truly his sins and he hated him to death and that was the agony that Jesus faced upon the cross. The ABHORRANCE of a holy God directed at your sins and mine that he willingly wore to purchase our justification.

That is the second "put" in imputation. Our sins were put on him and God's wrath was put on him that God might be just and that sin might be punished. There is one more put and this is the one that most of us don't know about.

3. His righteousness is PUT on us

The last put is the most glorious. Adam's sin was put on us, put into our account, that is why all die. Our sins were put on Christ, that is why he died, but here is the most glorious part: HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS IS PUT ON US! Look at what Paul says in these verses:

¹⁸Therefore, as through one man's offense **judgment came to all men**, resulting in condemnation, **even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.**

¹⁹For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also **by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.**

²⁰Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,

²¹so that as sin reigned in death, even so **grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.** (Romans 5:8-21. NKJV)

You see, this is the whole point of the sermon, this is why we have done our homework up until this point because for most people when they look at the cross they simple do not see enough. When most Christians look at the cross all they see there is the forgiveness of sins. They have 1/2 of a doctrine and so they are about 1/2 as grateful and full of joy as they should be. All they see is that because of Jesus our account is wiped clean, that there is therefore NO CONDEMNATION, as far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our sins from us. And that is true, praise the Lord it is true. It is true that your LOG book has been wiped free of any sins if you have put your faith in Jesus Christ. That is wonderfully and gloriously true but it is not the whole truth or even the best truth. There is something even better than entering the

presence of God with an empty book and do you know what that is? Entering the presence of God with a full book – a book full of the righteous deeds of Jesus Christ. That is what most Christians do not understand! Yes you are forgiven, but better than that the entirety of Christ’s righteous life is by faith CREDITED – ACCOUNTED – IMPUTED to your book! You do not enter heaven with a neutral standing, you enter heaven with a SUPERABUNDANCE OF PERFECT MERIT given as a free gift through Jesus Christ. That is what Paul is saying here, that is the whole truth of the Gospel. Most of us are only half as happy as we should be because we only know half of the good news. I read you HALF of 2 Corinthians 5:21, let me show you the rest:

²¹For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, **that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.** (2 Corinthians 5:21. NKJV)

My friends, this is the climax of the good news and this is why Luke was so careful to provide as his climax of the cross narrative the words of the centurion who said:

⁴⁷So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, **“Certainly this was a righteous Man!”** (Luke 23:47. NKJV)

Luke’s whole portrait of the cross event has been intended to impress us with the superabundance, the overflowing, mind numbing perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. I mean think about it, as Jesus is being crucified he is praying:

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:43. NKJV)

Who does that? What kind of man prays for the people who are nailing him to a piece of wood? And he’s not just forgiving people up there, he’s evangelizing! He’s leading people to Christ while he is dying on the cross! There is a criminal up there and Jesus leads him to Jesus while he’s dying on the cross!! He says:

“Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43. NKJV)

Who does that? Do you know what I would be saying while I was hanging on the cross? “AHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!” That’s what I would be saying. Jesus is evangelising and

forgiving people and conducting himself with peace, dignity and righteousness. Even the WAY he dies shows forth his perfection:

⁴⁶And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, *'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'*"⁴⁶ Having said this, He breathed His last. (Luke 23:46. NKJV)

That is how a perfect man dies.

⁴⁷So when the centurion saw what had happened, he glorified God, saying, "**Certainly this was a righteous Man!**" (Luke 23:47. NKJV)

Luke has been so careful to record the cross event as the climax of a perfect life because we are not just saved by his death, we are saved by his LIFE! The prophet foresaw this:

¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. **When you make his life an offering for sin,** he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper. (Isaiah 53:4-5, 10. NRSV)

The Apostle Paul understood this:

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, **we shall be saved by His life.** (Romans 5:10. NKJV)

Listen to me very carefully my friends and let me increase your enjoyment of the cross by telling you something that may at first sound terribly untrue but is in fact old and trusted Gospel gold. You were saved by works. Now, listen to me carefully. You were not saved by your works. The Bible is very clear about that:

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9. NKJV)

All our righteousness is as filthy rags, none of our works were sufficient for our salvation – AMEN? Amen. But how then are we saved? Not by our works, but by HIS WORKS. Paul says that very thing in Romans 5:

¹⁸Therefore, as through one man's offense *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, **even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.**

¹⁹For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also **by one Man's obedience many will be made**

righteous.

Jesus fulfilled all righteousness. He did all the works of God. He lived a perfect life and he died a perfect death. Certainly he was a righteous man. And because he was, your debts are paid. More than that, because everything he did in life has now been copied and pasted to your account, everything that is his in ETERNITY will be yours by right as well. That is what is meant by our being “joint heirs with Jesus”. Everything he earned in his life is given to us in the life to come. That my friends is the even better good news of what God has done in the life and death of Jesus Christ. And all God’s people said, amen.