

His Righteousness Seen In You

Romans 4 and 8 | Pastor Kevin B. Kneeland

Sometimes righteousness can be an elusive idea in the life of a Christian. If you have been a Christian for long, you may have heard some of these terms: Imputed righteousness; declared righteous; our righteousness is as filthy rags; imparted righteousness; clothed in the righteousness of Christ. But what does all this mean, and how can His righteousness be in me, and yet I sin? Is it possible to think we are righteous before God, and yet we have been deceived by the enemy? What does His righteousness even look like in the life of a born-again Christian? What does it even mean to be righteous? Is there such a thing as thinking we are righteous but yet we are far from righteous?

Which reminds me of a story... This is an old story by Hans Christian Andersen. The name of the story is "The Emperor's New Clothes". If you have not heard the story, hear it for the first time. If you have, enjoy this rendition. This is an abbreviated version.

Long ago in a land far away, there lived a great Emperor. This Emperor loved nothing more than to dress well. He always wanted the finest clothes. When he was out and about, it was to show off how wonderful he looked in his garments of fine linen.

But there were two crafty men who knew about the Emperor's weakness for clothes. They devised a scheme to make a fool of the Emperor. They told the Emperor that they could make him some of the finest clothes for him to wear, and there was something special about these clothes that were like no other clothes the Emperor had ever had. Only those fit to be in their position and those who were not stupid would be able to see these clothes. If one was not fit to be in their position or if one was stupid, they would not be able to see the clothes. The Emperor found this to be very beneficial for a man in his position. He would be able to tell who was stupid and who was not fit for their position! He agreed to allow the men to make him these clothes.

The men went hard at work and appeared to be working with linen and sewing and measuring and cutting, yet of course, they were not working with anything at all.

The Emperor was worried he would be unable to see the clothes, so he sent his prime minister in to check on how things were going. The prime minister looked at the clothes, but he saw nothing, yet he dare not say a word lest he be seen as a fool or as one not fit to be in his position. The prime minister raved about how beautiful the clothes were. Finally the Emperor saw it fit to see these new clothes. The Emperor looked, but of course saw nothing. He was horrified! Yet he dare not say a word about not seeing anything. He raved about how wonderful the clothes were and how he had never seen such crafty work. The two men convinced the Emperor to take off his clothes and put on his new clothes they made for him. Then he could go out on his parade so that everyone could see his new clothes.

The townspeople were told the clothes could only be seen by those who were fit to be in their position and were not fools. As the Emperor paraded the streets in his new clothes, everyone commented how wonderful the clothes looked. No one wanted to be seen as a fool! But then a young child yelled out "But he hasn't got anything on". The Emperor shivered, for he suspected the child was right. But he thought, "This procession has got to go on." So he walked more proudly than ever, as his noblemen held high the train that wasn't there at all.

And this story yet reminds me of another story... This story is similar to the first, but put to modern day situations... This story is called "Bob Emperton Is Puttin' On The Dog". *NOT long ago in a land close at hand, there lived a normal good guy named Bob Emperton. Bob loved nothing more than for others to think he was amazing. He always wanted the people to think that his spiritual walk with God was top notch and that that he understood all things theological and righteous.*

But there was a crafty enemy who knew about the Bob's weakness for outer approval and he devised a scheme to make a fool of the guy. He encouraged people in church to say flattering words to the Bob to puff him up – "My Bob – what style you've got!" "My Bob, what prayers you say!" "My Bob, I wish my husband was more like you!" and he had people at work compare him to a hero – the guy who would always save the day. He had people at the store smile with admiration and sweet grandmas would wink at him adoringly.

Bob Emperton was worried though. Should he let anyone know that he wasn't sure if he was making the grade? Should he let anyone know that he really didn't talk to God outside of church - yet he dare not say a word lest he be seen as a fool or as one not fit to be in his position as such a good "Christian" guy.

But one day at church during prayer time – horror of horrors – Bob heard the voice of God... "How did you come into my presence today with only your outer approval of men clothing you? Do you not know you are naked, pitiful and even blind? And I'm not fooled by your imaginations of right standing with Me. Go out from my presence and you may return again when you are clothed in my righteousness alone."

Lost and confused, Bob stumbled out of the church... his life a sham, his outer apparel in shreds...

And this story reminds me of a parable Jesus once spoke to the chief priests and the Pharisees. It is found in Matthew 22:1-14.

How often are Christian's caught thinking they are clothed in the righteousness of Christ, yet the truth is they have been deceived. They are not clothed at all! There is great danger in deceiving ourselves and trying to deceive others into believing we are righteous. As we look at righteousness, it is critical to know that righteousness can only come from God into our lives. This is where we must remain humble to know we are sinner's saved by grace. And it is critical

for us to choose to walk in HIS righteousness. Without His righteousness, we are like the naked Emperor. We may think we have our own righteousness, but that is impossible, as we are sinners, and so we stand naked.

As we look into this topic of righteousness further, I want us to get some foundational truths and some things we can all learn to live by to make sure we are not wearing the Emperor's new clothes thinking we are clothed in the righteousness of Christ when in fact we have nothing on.

NONE OF US ARE RIGHTEOUS

The Bible is very clear on this fact. It is impossible for us to be righteous in and of ourselves. If we do not know this and live by this, then we cannot ever obtain His righteousness. We will always think there is a chance for us to be okay on our own. Psalm 14:1-3 and Psalm 53:1-3 says there is none who does good. And Romans 3:10 says that NONE is righteous, not even one! Ecclesiastes 7:20 says surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins. Then Jesus removed any hope at all for an accepted righteousness when He said in Matthew 5:20, "unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven".

There is great danger in thinking we can put on our own righteousness and be right before a Holy God. The truth is, it is impossible for us to be righteous because of the sin in our lives. It may seem like I am speaking some very simple foundational truth in the Christian faith. It is because I am. I do not want to be misunderstood in this message to think that I am teaching we ourselves can be righteous. The Word is clear. There is none righteous, no not one! The moment you sin even once, you have blown it on being righteous. Jesus was the only righteous one to ever walk this life without sin. And so Jesus gives the unrighteous hope beyond hope. Jesus did not come to call the righteous but sinners – Mark 2:17. And although, none are righteous, our faith in God can be accounted to us as righteousness. Write this down. Our faith in God and Christ's work on the cross can be accounted to us as righteousness.

ACCOUNTED AS RIGHTEOUSNESS

Turn with me to Romans 4. Let's read Romans 4:1-5 and then Romans 4:13, 16, 17, 20-25. Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. It was not that Abraham was righteous. Righteousness was accounted to him because of his faith in God. Now let's look again at verses 23-25. We can be justified by our faith in Jesus. Now we too can be justified, or declared righteous by believing in Jesus. This is why there are so many verses that speak about the righteous. It is not a contradiction that the Bible says there is none righteous while then speaking about all the righteous. The righteous are righteous because of their faith in God! Let's read Philippians 3:8-9. So it is not our righteousness. It is a righteousness from God that comes through faith and trust in Him.

But there is a trap that is easy to fall into, and that I have fallen into. This trap believes a lie from the enemy. The lie goes something like this... Jesus died for my sins. By faith, I am

accepted by Him and was forgiven. He then gave me His righteousness. My choice is done. I am now declared righteous no matter what I do. But what does it mean when scripture says Abraham believed God? Let's look deeper into Abraham's life. What did he believe God for? And what can this teach us about how we can believe God?

1. God told Abraham to go out from Ur – We can believe God has a purpose and destiny for our lives.
2. God made a covenant with Abraham – We can believe God will not forsake His covenant with me!
3. God told Abraham, you are going to be a father of nations – We can believe God for a harvest for our labors for Him as we follow, trust, and believe Him.
4. God told Abraham, you are going to have a son. – We can believe God for the promises in scripture and believe Him for the promises He has given us!
5. God told Abraham to sacrifice your son, Isaac – We can believe God for is our provider, Jehovah-Jireh.

His life did not simply consist of believing. His believing took action. It is the faith with works that James speaks about in James 2. Read James 2:14-26. Now let's look a little deeper in scripture. It is tempting to stop here when talking about righteousness. We have His righteousness credited to us, and we stop there. But did you know all God gave as law can be completed in us?

RIGHTEOUS REQUIREMENT OF THE LAW FULFILLED IN US

In Luke 9:23 Jesus says, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." In Romans 8, we see the explanation of this. Let's read Romans 8:1-5. There is a clear choice we make to live according to the flesh or to live according to the Spirit. The truth is, we cannot say, well I am a Christian; therefore I am automatically living according to the Spirit. No. If we believe that lie, we are like the Emperor with no clothes on. We must die daily to the deeds of the flesh. We must live according to the Spirit. This is putting feet to what Abraham did when He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. What do we do when we face a situation when a brother is causing us to be angry with a sinful anger? What do we do when we pass a magazine rack with dirty magazines? What do we do when we have an opportunity to steal without anyone else knowing? We have the choice to pick up our cross and follow Jesus and walk according to the Spirit. This is how the righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled in us. We walk NOT according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. And all along as we see the unfolding of the righteous requirement of the law fulfilled in us, we must remain humble. Remember the first point, there is none righteous, no not one! This still holds true. We are only righteous because we are counted as righteous. Humility is tied to the righteous.

So as I close, let's consider these two points. Do you believe God and do you walk according to the Spirit? Let's look at one last story about Charles Wesley who was an English leader in the Methodist movement.

Although Charles Wesley had been engaged in preaching the gospel with much diligence and earnestness, he did not know what it was to enjoy peace with God until he was in his thirtieth year. Being laid low by an alarming illness, and seeming as if he were going to die, a young Moravian named Peter Bohler, who was undergoing a course of preparation by him to go out as a missionary, asked him, "Do you hope to be saved?" Charles answered, "Yes."

"For what reason do you hope it?" "Because I have used my best endeavors to serve God," was his reply. The Moravian shook his head and said no more.

That sad, silent, significant shake of the head shattered all Charles Wesley's false foundation of salvation by endeavors. He was afterwards taught by Peter Bohler the way of the Lord more completely, and brought to see that by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ men are justified. And now in his sick-room, he was able to write for the first time in his life, "I now find myself at peace with God"; and it was on this occasion he composed that beautiful hymn, "O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise!"

Our hope likewise need only rest in the finished work of our remarkable Redeemer. Our righteousness is not about our righteousness. Our righteousness is the gift of the imputation, the transfer, of the righteousness of Christ credited, as it were, to our account. The debt that we couldn't pay, He paid.