

## **Kelham Baptist Church Virtual Worship Service, April 5, 2020, PM**

### **The Imputed Righteousness of Christ: What It Means for Us**

Song: "At the Cross"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F02SYN3zByk>

Song: "There Is a Fountain"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpE5auji4Pc>

Song: "And Can It Be"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VAOI2xwmYAw>

**When I was a child**, I enjoyed going to the dentist's or doctor's office for one thing and one thing only. Both places had the Highlights magazine. If you are my age, you may remember it. If I am not mistaken, it is still published. There were two features I particularly enjoyed, Goofus and Gallant and Hidden Pictures. Goofus and Gallant, if you recall, contrasted two boys responding to the same situation. Goofus inevitably responded badly, while Gallant responded appropriately and maturely. Hidden Pictures featured a large picture page with smaller pictures hidden within the lines of the large picture. I always enjoyed searching for the smaller pictures. The problem with doing that was that often I missed "the big picture." We call it not being able to see the forest for the trees. Focusing on the details, we miss the larger truth.

**As I studied John 5 this week, I found myself forcibly** pulled out of the trees of the details of the story of the man healed at the Pool of Bethesda to see the larger

picture of Jesus. Jesus did not strategically heal the man so He could assert His identity as God. This was not a political move, so to speak, on His part to confront the Jewish leaders. Jesus felt compassion on the man. Of course, Jesus understood the implications of what He was doing and knew the outcome; but those factors did not motivate Him. In the home of Zacchaeus, the despised tax collector, Jesus proclaimed one of the purposes of His coming: “The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). This was not a mere task or job for Jesus. He was motivated by love for the Father, who loved the world so much He sent His only Son to die. Hebrews 4:15 focuses on the true humanity of Jesus: “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” “Touched with the feeling” translates the Greek word συμπάθεω. If we change the Greek letters of that word into English letters, we get “sympathy,” to share the experience of another, fellow suffering. “Infirmities” is plural—as human beings, we all have multiple weaknesses. The word “infirmities” comes into English as “asthenia.” We see it in disease names, like *myasthenia gravis*. Jesus sympathizes with our condition. But He did more: that is evident from the number of times the gospel writers describe Jesus as “moved with compassion” (Matt. 9:36; 14:14; cf. 20:34; Mark 1:41; 6:34; cf. 8:2; Luke 7:13).

**Jesus healed the man at the Pool of Bethesda** because He sympathized as a Man and He had compassion as God. That is simplistic and probably Christologically flawed, but it is the best way I can express it. “Compassion” is not mere feelings for another but feelings that result in action. That is the character of God. Deuteronomy 13:17 speaks of God showing “mercy” and having “compassion” on repentant Israel,

as does Deuteronomy 30:3. David described God as “full of compassion” (Ps. 78:38; 86:15; 111:4; 112:4; 145:8). That is who He is, and that is who Jesus is. The story of the good Samaritan, you recall, hinged on the fact that the “Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him” (Luke 10:33). It is little wonder the allegorical interpreters of the early church saw the Samaritan as a picture of Christ. The father in the story of the prodigal son saw his son “yet a great way off” (15:20) “and had compassion.” God cares. Peter reminded us, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). “Cares” is worries and anxieties, burdens or loads of trouble that come with our lot in life. “Careth” is present tense—ongoing, continuous action. We matter to God.

**Should we not be astounded and amazed** that the Creator of the universe, the One who alone spoke matter into existence and who upholds the universe at all times in every moment by the word of His power cares for creatures like you and me, people the pandemic hysteria would record as statistics? God knows no statistics. He know His people. Jesus made that clear: “But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than any sparrows” (Luke 12:7).

**As human beings, we “sympathize” with others**, but that does not always produce in “compassion,” feeling that results in action. Jesus sympathizes and has compassion. Do you know what Hebrews says right after it says we have a High Priest who is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (4:15)? “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (vs. 16). Because our Saviour is who He is, we can go to Him boldly

whenever we have a need. We are certainly in a time of need right now as communities, as a nation, as a world.

**I read a couple of interesting stories this week** about some results of the Covid-19 pandemic. *The Christian Post* cited a study that showed the Coronavirus outbreak is causing Americans to pray more (<https://www.christianpost.com/news/coronavirus-causing-americans-to-pray-more-new-study-says.html>). PEW concluded 55% of Americans say “they have prayed for an end to the pandemic. ... Even among those who seldom or never pray, 15% said they have been praying for an end to the coronavirus while 24% of those who do not belong to any religion say they have been praying.” The Joshua Fund poll, a group run by Christian author Joel Rosenberg, revealed “fully one-in-five non-Christians (21.5%) polled said the crisis is causing them to start reading the Bible and listen to Bible teaching and Christian sermons online even though they usually don’t, search online to learn more about Bible prophecy and God’s plan for the future of mankind, and have more spiritual conversations with family and friends” (<https://www.christianpost.com/news/coronavirus-causing-americans-to-pray-more-new-study-says.html>).

**One of the most significant teachings of Christian faith** to me is what is called “imputed righteousness.” This may seem to some of you like chasing a theological rabbit, but it is not. You may have never heard the term “imputed righteousness” before, but if you are a Christian, you should know the joyous truth. You may think this is way too complicated and theological sounding, but that is simply not correct. None of those things is true. Imputed righteousness was one of the foundational

principles in the Reformation. It stresses salvation by grace alone, totally apart from works. We are helpless and hopeless before God without grace. Paul explained it in Ephesians. In chapter 2, he began by describing the condition of mankind apart from Jesus Christ: “dead in trespasses and sins” (vs. 1), walking by the spirit of this world (vs. 2), doing all the desires of body and mind, “by nature children of [deserving of, resting under] God’s wrath” (vs. 3). He concluded in verse 8, “by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works lest any man should boast.”

**Romans 4:22-25 mentions imputed righteousness** in regard to Abraham’s faith:

“And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.” In each instance in which “imputed” appears, Paul used the Greek word λογίζομαι, which means to “count,” “reckon,” “determine,” or “number.” The original word was an accounting word used of entering figures into accounts. When you enter numbers into your checkbook, you don’t usually have the actual cash in front of you. You may have a deposit slip or a check stub, memorializing a transaction. It is that way with imputed righteousness.

John Walvoord explained, “The imputation of righteousness is a judicial act by which the believer is declared righteous before a holy God.... It is not an experience but a fact of divine reckoning.... The imputation of righteousness to believers in Christ is one of the most important doctrines of the NT and rests at the heart of the doctrine

of salvation... it is reckoned to the believer at the moment of faith and becomes his forever by judicial declaration of God" (*Baker's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 282). Unger drove the point home, noting the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross "made possible a release of all that He is in infinite merit, bestowing this merit on the meritless" (*Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 521). Note the last words—"bestowing this merit on the meritless."

Practically, what that means is *that Jesus' obedience becomes our obedience when we believe*. To particularize: When we see Jesus obeying the Father in Scripture, the doctrine of imputed righteousness teaches us that *His* obedience is *our* obedience by us being in Christ. Every act of obedience, following the Father's will, becomes our act of obedience at salvation. This is an incredibly glorious truth. When we see Jesus as a Boy obeying His parents, it is our obedience. When we see Jesus doing good, feeding five thousand, healing lepers, curing the sick, it is our doing good. When we see Jesus submitting to the Father at the cross, it is our submitting. Every act of His obedience is also ours by imputation. That may seem incredible, but it is true. His righteous obedience becomes our righteous obedience.

Salvation does not merely involve removal of sin (our sin being placed on Christ); it also involves the gift of God's righteousness (His righteousness being credited to us). Second Corinthians 5:21 explains it plainly: "For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Think of that: the righteousness of God. Not our righteousness, which is but filthy rags (Isa. 64:6), but God's absolute righteousness. If we did not receive the imputed

righteousness of Jesus, none of us would have any hope. All our failures, sins, and misdeeds were laid on Him, and all His obedience and righteousness were laid on us. The only way in which we can meet God's standard that Jesus set forth in the sermon on the mount ("Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect," Matt. 5:48) is by having Christ's righteousness imputed to us. Theologians speak of the *active* and *passive* obedience of Christ. His active obedience was His life of sinless perfection. His passive obedience was His sacrifice on the cross. As one writer explained, "His passive obedience pays our sin debt before God, but it is the active obedience that gives us the perfection God requires."

Sacramental churches reject the Bible's teaching of imputed righteousness. The Catholic church, for example, deals with the issue through the doctrine of purgatory, a place in which a person is purged, or purified, of remaining sin by the meritorious acts of persons still on earth (i.e., prayers, masses, pilgrimages, etc.). The Catholic church speaks of "infused righteousness," the idea that "when God declares someone righteous in Christ he [sic] actually makes that person righteous. This, therefore, means that someone is now infused with the righteousness of Christ. Christ's righteousness is a present reality, but it is in the form of that person's own righteousness"

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imputed\\_righteousness#Arguments\\_against\\_the\\_doctrine\\_of\\_imputed\\_righteousness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imputed_righteousness#Arguments_against_the_doctrine_of_imputed_righteousness)). That righteousness get "infused" by partaking of the seven sacraments of the Catholic church (baptism, confirmation, communion, penance, holy orders, and marriage). "Sacrament" contains the idea of making holy. The belief is taking a particular sacrament adds grace to a person, increasing his or her righteousness.

This is works righteousness. When Jesus died on the cross, He cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30), not "the rest is up to you."

John Piper gave an interesting story to illustrate imputed righteousness: "Here's a very imperfect analogy. But I will risk it in the hope of greater understanding.

Suppose I say to Barnabas, my sixteen-year-old son, 'Clean up your room before you go to school. You must have a clean room, or you won't be able to go watch the game tonight.' Well, suppose he plans poorly and leaves for school without cleaning the room. And suppose I discover the messy room and clean it. His afternoon fills up and he gets home just before it's time to leave for the game and realizes what he has done and feels terrible. He apologizes and humbly accepts the consequences.

To which I say, 'Barnabas, I am going to credit your apology and submission as a clean room. I said, "You must have a clean room, or you won't be able to go watch the game tonight. Your room is clean. So you can go to the game." What I mean when I say, 'I credit your apology as a clean room,' is not that the apology is the clean room. Nor that he really cleaned his room. I cleaned it. It was pure grace. All I mean is that, in my way of reckoning—in my grace—his apology connects him with the promise given for a clean room. The clean room is his clean room. I credit it to him. Or, I credit his apology as a clean room. You can say it either way. And Paul said it both ways: 'Faith is credited as righteousness,' and 'God credits righteousness to us through faith.'"

To put the practical importance of imputed righteousness in perspective, I quote John Piper's closing remarks on its significance: "I linger over this issue of the imputed righteousness of God in Christ because when I stand by your bed in the hour of your death, I want to be able to look down into your face and remind you of the most comforting words in all the world, and have you rejoice with solid Biblical



understanding in what I mean when I say: ‘Remember, Christ is your righteousness. Christ is your righteousness. Your righteousness is in heaven. It's the same yesterday today and forever. It doesn't get better when your faith is strong. It doesn't get worse when your faith is weak. It is perfect. It is Christ. Look away from yourself. Rest in him. Lean on him’” (<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/faith-and-the-imputation-of-righteousness>). His righteous obedience God sees as our righteous obedience. Every act of mercy, every instance of doing good, every glorious healing, imputed to you and me. It may sound too good to be true, but it is true—our sin on Him; His righteousness on us.

In his book on worship (*Look and See*), singer/songwriter Matt Papa says, “The triune God is the only thing large enough and interesting enough to bear the weight of glory, and ultimately worship. Anything else will break your heart. Money isn’t secure enough.... Entertainment isn’t impressive enough. Music isn’t interesting enough. Food isn’t satisfying enough. People aren’t reliable enough. The world isn’t good enough. Creation isn’t permanent enough.... Only God, the highest and greatest good, the infinite holy One, is finally enough.” Nothing can bear the weight of your worship other than Jesus Christ!”

**Prayer:** God, may You heal our nation and our world. Draw us from the things of life to You, the One who alone gives life and sustains life, the only One worthy of worship. Draw us from things that don’t matter to eternal truth. Guide those who represent us. Give them divine wisdom, not merely the human wisdom they already possess. Give them Your sympathy and compassion for a lost and dying world. Open

the hearts and minds of those who do not know You to Your truth. Help us to redeem the time we have left. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Closing Song: "God and God Alone"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSuFA7ZZL-M>