

INTRODUCTION

I'd like to begin by asking you a question. What person is as righteous as Jesus is. That person is here today in our sanctuary, and Romans 4:19-25 reveals who it is.

The Substitutionary Death of Jesus

In Chapter 4, Paul teaches that the Old Testament people of God were saved in the same way that we, His New Testament people, are – through faith. He uses Abraham's faith to illustrate that and reveals the person who is as righteous as Jesus is in the process of doing so.

Let's start with verse 25, which mentions the substitutionary death of Jesus. He **"was delivered over because of our transgressions."** Peter explains it this way in 1 Peter 2:24: **"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross."** He took into Himself all of our sins and paid the penalty for them that we should have paid.

To help us understand the staggering implication of that, think of it in these terms. The median age of people on earth is approximately 28 years-old. So let's suppose that each person is only 28 years-old. Let's also suppose that each has sinned an average of only once a week. Taking into account that there are seven billion people on earth, let's estimate how many sins that is. It's 10,192,000,000,000 sins. Now, let's imagine what those sins include: adultery, homosexuality, pedophilia, murder, kidnapping, stealing, lying, gossiping, and filthy language to name a few. That helps us grasp what the substitutionary death of Jesus means. He bore all of those ten trillion sins in His body on the cross.

The Historical Resurrection of Jesus

Verse 25 mentions something else about Jesus. He **"was raised."** At 3:00 p.m. on Friday, He was dead. At sunrise on Sunday, He was alive because He rose from the dead.

This resurrection of His isn't mythological. It's historical instead. Think about the death of Abraham Lincoln. He died at a certain time, 7:22 a.m., on a certain day, April 15, 1865, at a certain place, William Petersen's boarding house in Washington D.C. Now think about the resurrection of Jesus. He rose on at a certain time, if there had been clocks, on a certain day, at a certain place, the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. He rose just as Abraham Lincoln died, in other words – in time and space, in history.

Because His resurrection was historical, it was material as well. Romans 8:11 teaches that the Holy Spirit "**gave life**" to His mortal body. More particularly, as John Updike explains it, the Holy Spirit reversed the dissolution of its cells, reknit its molecules, and rekindled its amino acids. The result was that Jesus was just as really and truly alive on Sunday as He was really and truly dead on Friday and Saturday.

Those then are the two things that verse 25 mentions about Jesus. One is His substitutionary death. He died for our sins. The other is His historical resurrection. He rose from the dead.

Paul mentions those two events here because they're "**of first importance**" as he writes in 1 Corinthians 15:3. That means that they are the two most significant events in human history. They impact humanity far more profoundly than any other events ever have or ever will. They enable Father God to do two things for us.

Righteousness Imputed

The first is to impute righteousness to us. Consider a word Paul uses 10 times in Chapter 4, including three times in our text in verses 22, 23, and 24. It's the word that the NASB translates "**credited.**" I actually like the KJV translation better, "**imputed.**"

I have a question that helps explain how Father God imputes righteousness to us. I've asked it before. Who is the most evil person who ever lived? People would give a variety of answers. Some of us might say it's Jihadi John. He's the ISIS executioner who was taped

beheading British worker David Haines and U.S. journalists James Foley and Stephen Sotloff. Imagine the degree of malevolence it would take to do such a dastardly deed. Jihadi John the very embodiment of evil.

But he isn't the right answer to the question, **"Who is the most evil person who ever lived?"** Many of you know the right answer because I've preached it before. It's Jesus. During His six hours on the cross, he was more evil than Jihadi John or anyone else who ever lived. That's because, as I've already explained, He was their substitute and ours there. He took into Himself all of their sins and ours as well. Those sins include the decapitations of Haines, Foley, and Sotloff.

Now, here's what I want you to grasp. Because Jesus became the most evil person who ever lived, you or I who follow Him have become the most righteous person who ever lived. Paul explains it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:21, **"He (God) made Him who knew no sin (Jesus) to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."** Notice what we become, the righteousness of God in Jesus – that is, the righteousness of Jesus Himself.

Now, the word **"impute"** in verses 22-24 reveals how we become that. Father God imputes that righteousness to us. That means that He thinks and acts as if we're as righteous as Jesus is. He regards and treats us as persons who have always done what is good and who have never once done what is bad. He views us and responds to us, in other words, as if we're sinless and perfect, as Jesus is.

Think of it in terms of Jihadi John. Suppose he decides to follow Jesus. The moment he does, he becomes utterly righteous in the sight of Father God. Father God begins to think, feel, and act toward him as if he's as sinless and perfect as Jesus is. If He'll do that for Jihadi John, believe me, He'll do it for you and me as well. He'll impute the righteousness of Jesus to us.

Righteousness Imparted

The substitutionary death and historical resurrection of Jesus

enable Father God to do a second thing. As Paul says it in Philippians 1:11, He fills us with the fruit of righteousness. Or as theologians say it, He *imparts* righteousness to us. *Imputed* righteousness isn't about what we actually are. It's about how Father God views us. *Imparted* righteousness is about what we actually are. It's about what Father God makes us.

When I say righteous in this context, I obviously don't mean sinless and perfect as Jesus is. None of us in reality are that. What I do mean is as good as it's possible for a finite and fallen human being to be. Thinking, feeling, and acting like Jesus is normal for us. Thinking, feeling, and acting unlike Jesus is exceptional for us.

The Bible gives us a detailed picture of what a righteous person and life look like. I have goodwill toward those who insult or humiliate me. I eagerly pull for the success of those who are competing with me for favor, position, or financial gain. I care about the welfare of those who sue me. I don't desire or seek the praise of others for my good deeds or traits. I receive the trials of life with confidence, and joy. I'm utterly at ease in the face of death, and so on. That sampling helps us define what imparted righteousness is. We routinely think, feel, and act like Jesus.

But how is that righteousness imparted to us? The Bible tells us. It's by the Holy Spirit transforming what we are inside. It's by the Holy Spirit forming our inner dimensions (thoughts, feelings, will, soul, and bodily habits) into the image and likeness of Jesus.

An old joke captures the substance of what He does to us, "**When is a door not a door?**" The answer is, "**When it's ajar.**" It's a play on words. A door is not a door, in other words, when it's something else. Along those same lines, using a sample sin, when is a gossip no longer a gossip? The answer is, "**When he is something else.**" It's isn't just when he no longer gossips. Even though he no longer assaults people's reputations (because he knows it's wrong), he may still desire to. Thus, he's still a gossip at heart. It's when he desires to protect people's reputations, not assault them, that he's no longer a gossip. He is then,

by his very nature, something else.

That's how Father God imparts the righteousness of Jesus to us. The Holy Spirit transforms what we are. He slowly but surely changes us into something else, actually someone else – one who is like Jesus. Our thoughts, feeling, bodily habits, and decisions become less and less *unlike* Jesus and more and more *like* Him

Saving Faith

So that's what the substitutionary death and historical resurrection of Jesus enable Father God to do. Impute and impart righteousness to us. He can do that and He will, but only if we have saving faith. That's the message of our text. But what is saving faith? Paul tells us.

Notice the term "**promise of God**" in verse 20. It refers to God promising Abraham and his wife Sarah that she would give birth to their first child, a son. But Abraham was a 100 years-old at the time and Sarah was 90. His body and her womb, therefore, were "**dead**" to quote verse 20. They were well past the age of conceiving and bearing a child.

But Abraham believed and Paul emphasizes, in describing his believing, the degree to which he did. Verse 19 - "**without becoming weak in faith.**" Verse 20 - "**did not waver in unbelief.**" Verse 20 - "**grew strong in faith.**" And verse 21, "**being fully assured.**" Remember what I said last week. Belief or faith involves a readiness to act as if something is so. In this case, Abraham acted as if it was so that God was utterly good and great and consequently, that He was willing and able to do what He promised – give Sarah and Him a son. That was his faith and according to verse 22, it was imputed to him as righteousness. It was saving faith.

According to verse 23-24, saving faith is the same for us as it was for Abraham, except that it's now directed to Jesus. Jesus is real and alive. He is also the greatest and best, utterly lovely or good and utterly competent or great. To have saving faith means to act as if that's so.

Oswald Chambers tells us what the action of that faith is. We make

Jesus **“the dominating concentration of our life.”** Oswald defined that more particularly. We’re **“carefully careless about everything else in comparison to that.”** Grasp what he’s saying? We should be careful about how we eat, work, play, treat our spouse, raise our children, and so on. But we should be **“careful”** about those concerns **“carelessly”** to quote Oswald. He means **“carelessly”** in comparison to Jesus. We make Jesus, not anyone else or anything else, the great **“care”** of our lives. Believing He’s utterly lovely, we make the decision to be with Him. Believing He’s utterly competent, we also make the decision to become like Him and to do all He says. We then arrange all of our affairs around carrying out those decisions. We have saving faith when we do.

Some years ago, I talked with a conflicted Christian mother. Her husband and she were trying to teach their children God first, family second, church third, and sports fourth. But at the same time, she said, their lives revolved around the games and practices of their children. Everything else, including Jesus, she admitted, took a backseat to sports.

She was conflicted about that and should have been. She recognized the truth. Her husband, children, and she were acting as if sports, not Jesus, was the greatest and best. It, not Him, was the **“dominating concentration”** of their lives. They were **“careful”** about it and **“carelessly careful”** about Him.

But saving faith reverses that order with regard to everything. Believing that Jesus is the greatest and best, we act like it. We make Him the **“dominating concentration”** of our lives. We’re **“careful”** about Him and **“carelessly careful”** about everything else.

Conclusion

So there you have it – the message of our text. And it answers our original question. What person is as righteous as Jesus is? If you have saving faith – if you act as if Jesus is the greatest and best – the answer is, **“You are!”** You are as righteous, in God’s sight, as Jesus is.