***The Just Shall Live by Faith
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We are looking once more at Romans 1:17 on the subject of "Justification by Faith." As you know, the theme of the book of Romans is just that: justification by faith. This was expressed to us in Romans 1:16, when Paul said, "For I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

**Righteousness**

Now verse 17 is the key verse of this book. It explains to us why the gospel is the power of God to salvation. The righteousness of God, we pointed out in the last session, and the righteousness of man are two different things. That seemed to come as somewhat of a surprise to some people, which only shows how frequently we are in the habit of misunderstanding. People view here a pool of righteousness, and then they view something in the form of a thermometer in that righteousness. At the top, we have 100, and at the bottom we have zero. And all along this scale of this thermometer is the impression that human righteousness (or human good) is measuring the same thing as divine good. So, the impression is given that human righteousness and divine righteousness are one and the same thing. It is very important that you understand that this is not the case.

**Human Righteousness**

Human righteousness we are seeing comes from the sin nature. And because it comes from just the strong factors in the old sin nature, God completely rejects human righteousness. So, even if on the scale of human righteousness, a person were able to gong out here at 100%, he would still not go to heaven. That would not carry him.

**Divine Righteousness**

Divine righteousness is in a totally different category, and these two are in no way related. On the cross, God absolutely rejected human righteousness.

So, the question is: how are you and I going to face God; that is, on who’s good are you going to face God? You can face God on human good, or you can face God on the good of Jesus Christ. The good which He created on the cross is divine good, and that is what God says is necessary for our eternal salvation. In other words, the Bible says, "Human God is in God's filthy rags." That is very important that we understand that, and that people that you witness to understand that. Otherwise, they will be looking at themselves and saying, "Well, I'm a 50% pretty good person, and if God comes through with the other 50%, I should make it. And the better they are, as we are going to find here shortly in the book of Romans, and the more moral a person is, the harder it is for that person to be able to accept what God has to offer in the way of divine good. His human good stands in the way of his own thinking so that it blinds him to God's basis of righteousness.

**Imputation**

So, God's only method of salvation is to give a sinner the righteousness of God, the divine good of the Lord Jesus Christ, and thereby to qualify the sinner to enter heaven. This is called imputation. God's absolute righteousness, however, is not violated when He does this. That's the beauty and the glory of what Romans is going to explain to us: how an absolutely holy God can bring a totally decrepit sinner into His heaven without God Himself violating His holiness.

Remember that God's holiness is the result of God's justice plus God's righteousness. God's justice and God's righteousness equals His holiness. That means that God, to be absolutely fair, must punish sin, with no "ands," "ifs," or, "buts." For God to be righteous, He must not allow any sin to enter His heaven. He can only have absolute righteousness in heaven because He is absolute righteousness. So, God, to bring a sinner into heaven, has to be able to secure; to maintain; and, to preserve His justice and His righteousness, and thus in no way to violate His holiness.

**The Gospel**

That is the magnificence of the gospel. And verse 17 is telling us that the gospel is the power of God because the righteousness of God is revealed in that gospel – God, having pursued His righteousness.

So, verse 17 says, "For it is the righteousness of God revealed." The word "revealed" is the Greek word "apokalupto." "Apokalupto" is present tense, which means that it's constantly being revealed. The righteousness of God is constantly being revealed here through the gospel. It is passive, which means that the working of God's righteousness in the gospel (taking a sinner to heaven) is just working passively. You and I don't do anything to create that. It's indicative mood, which means it's a reality.

**God's Righteousness**

So, God has demonstrated, through the gospel, His own righteousness. Righteousness is part of the essence of God. There are several facets to God's essence, and none of them can be violated in the process of providing salvation for us. God had to remain true to what He is. God is immutable. Therefore, God could never do anything that would cause Him no longer to be righteous, or no longer be just. Because God is immutable, He cannot change what He is. He has to remain perfect righteousness and absolute justice.

God's justice cannot be corrupted, so His holiness, in turn, would not be corrupted. God's love cannot be debased.

**Hell**

Here's what I was referring to this in the previous session. This is another favorite trick of the professional preacher: to tell you, "Oh, I don't think that God would do this or do that," as if anybody cares one bit what a professional or an unprofessional preacher thinks. The thing that's important is what God has said. Yet, there are many religious groups that say, "Oh, I cannot envision a God of love who would take a human being, and cast that human being in a lake that's burning where he could actually feel physical pain, not only in his soul, but even put that person's body in there so that that person's body is forever experiencing pain." Haven't you ever touched a stove? Haven't you accidentally spilled grease on your hand? Haven't you ever touched a hot frying pan? You know what that feels like now. Now, are you suggesting that for all eternity, God (a God of love) is going to make people suffer like that?

And what they're trying to say is, "We believe that God is love, but we want to cancel out His wrath." But the love of God cannot violate His own righteousness. Therefore, God's love has to be free to be expressed toward a sinner in such a way that God does not violate His own justice. And justice calls for His wrath to be expressed. You will find that all the other attributes of God will fit exactly in the same way. God will not ever be anything else.

For this reason, the Lord Jesus Christ took care of all human sin on the cross, and rejected all human good from the old sin nature. And He did it in such a way that He did not compromise the holiness of God. The reason He could do this is because He was born without a human father. Therefore, back into the stream of the human race was injected a human being who was once more perfectly free of internal sin. He was back to the condition of Adam. And thus, because He never sinned in His earthly life, He was able to go to the cross as one who was spiritually alive, and on that cross, pay the price of our sins by dying for us spiritually, and then dying for us physically. He died spiritually for mankind so that we could then be given, as 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us, the righteousness of God in Him. His absolute righteousness is imputed to our account.

**Justification**

So, this is not a fiction. When you walk into heaven, you won't have to walk in with some reservations as to whether they will accept you. You won't have to walk in and say, "I'm absolutely perfect," and then look around really quick to see if anybody's going to question or challenge that. You are going to walk into heaven and say, "I'm absolutely perfect. As a matter of fact, you can check my record. I never did anything wrong." Now, that's justification. That's absolute removal of all guilt. And that's what we're talking about.

**Trusting in Christ**

Do you see the idiocy of this other system of trying to equate human righteousness, and God's righteousness, and putting it together? That is the kiss of death. That kind of mixture will cause you to enter the lake of fire. God's love has been free indeed to do what it wants to do, but it has been given a proper basis for God to be able to do this. And a believing sinner may receive this love by simply trusting in Christ.

So, the great revelation of the gospel, which makes it so powerful, is that God has remained absolutely right. God did no wrong in making it possible for us to go to heaven. The old sin nature love that people have is willing to do wrong. There are many times when we are willing to excuse people who are doing wrong just because we love them. And sometimes you hear the phrase, "Well, just love people." They're doing every wrong thing imaginable. They're reducing themselves to an animal level of existence: "Just love them." That'll get you exactly no place. Until there is a change internally, love isn't going to get anywhere. And that internal change will not come about until God Himself does it for us.

So, when you and I, as believers, understand this, we will recognize that we've already been changed inside. So, whatever the conflicts; whatever the shortcomings; and, whatever the problems we have, we've already got the basis for solving this, because we are no longer functioning on human good. That is dead, gone, and discarded. We are functioning on God's divine good, and all you have to do is learn a lot about the Word of God so that you can let the thing come through. You can let the sunshine through. You can let the thing follow its normal course of action in your life. And we are forever standing in the way of God's divine good operating in us.

Knowing this gospel reveals the love of God. But just knowing it is not enough to give us peace. You must know it in terms of having accepted it, and having believed it. As I said in the previous session, one of the finest expressions of negative emotion is: "He who is convinced against his will, is of the same opinion still. That is an excellent summary of negative position. Many a Christian, as well as vast numbers of unbelievers, finally face you off and say, "I cannot answer what you say. I cannot deny what you say. I cannot challenge what you say. I cannot discard what you say. What you say is absolutely, on the authority of the Word of God, what it teaches. But you are forcing me to accept an opinion I don't want. Therefore, you have convinced me, but against my will. So, I'm going to keep my opinion still. Another variation of that is: "I have made up my mind. Don't confuse me with the facts." It all comes out the same way.

So, we are certain of a place in heaven. ... We've been listening to a few things in these last few session that may make you wonder how many more years you have someplace to go, but wherever the next few years may lead us, ultimately, your destiny is going to be heaven. And the gospel reveals to us the fantastic thing that God came up with – a marvelous plan to make that absolutely certain.

Negative sinners want to stress the love of God apart from His righteousness. So, they ignore the fact that He is also a God of wrath. Then all they have is religion.

**From Faith**

So, Romans 1:17, says that: "The gospel is the righteousness of God." That's why it's powerful: "Revealed from faith." Here are a couple of tough, little words – this expression "from faith to faith." We're getting down to the key dramatic phrase that turned the world around during the Reformation. But let's look at these words first. "From faith" is the Greek "ek pistis" (the word for "faith"). "From faith" means "on the basis of faith." You should not connect this expression "from faith" with the world "is revealed." Connect it with the word "righteousness." So, the idea is righteousness on the basis of faith is revealed, connecting righteousness and faith. It is God's righteousness on the basis of faith which is revealed. You cannot know anything about the righteousness of God except on the basis of faith. You cannot see God. You cannot taste Him. You cannot touch Him. You cannot talk to Him directly. When you talk about the righteousness of God, it is faith in the authority of His revelation – the revelation of the Word of God.

So, "from faith" simply means here righteousness on the basis of faith. The unbeliever does not believe the gospel. Therefore, he does not see the righteousness of God. He has no faith. To him it is foolishness. Spiritual information comes on the basis of faith. Every bit of God's viewpoint you possess in your mind at this moment, you got one way. You got it because you believed something that God told you. And the place that God has told you everything is in the Word of God. So, every time you've heard instruction in the Word of God, that you have received it, by faith (which is the only way you could have receive it), then you have advanced into God's viewpoint.

**To Faith**

Then it says, "To faith," which is "eis pistis." Eis is the preposition which means "into," and we have the word "faith" again. It says, "From faith (on the basis of faith) to faith (or into something); that is, from a lost condition, by faith in the gospel, into eternal life, and the status of continuing in faith and trusting of Christ." The absolute righteousness of God is understood on the basis of faith. That's what we're saying. How do I understand that God is absolutely righteous? It is not by empiricism (my senses). It is not by reasoning (rationalism). I know that God is righteous because the Word of God tells me this is so. I know that there is a lake of fire because the Word tells me so. I know that people who reject as Savior are going to go into the lake of fire.

I know that when a kind man like Jack Benny dies, because he is a Jew who rejects the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, there is no place else that he can be headed for but lake of fire. So, now he rests in the place called Torments in Hades, in his soul, waiting for the time when his body is to be resurrected, and he's going to go to the lake of fire. How do I know that? Only because the Bible tells me. I've not seen the lake of fire. I've had no other information but the information of this book.

So, what this verse is saying is that, on the basis of faith into faith, it is understood by only what you believe from the Word of God. So, the phrase should be this: "The righteousness of God, on the basis of faith, is revealed to the one who has faith. What you understand about God's righteousness (or anything else about God), you understand by faith, to the one who moves in a life of faith. You start off believing God. And the only life after that is to continue to believe God – to continue to believe his promises. A life that begins by faith in Christ continues on the faith rest principles. Maybe that's another way that you could say that.

**The Just Shall Live by Faith**

The proof of this is Habakkuk 2:4, and Paul, at this point, quotes this Old Testament verse, which says, "The just shall live by faith," and he precedes that with: "As it is written." As it is written" refers to Habakkuk 2:4. "As it is written" is the Greek word "grapho." It is in the perfect tense, which is that tense where a thing begins here in the past, and then it continues in the present. It goes from the past to the present, and then it continues on. That's perfect tense. So, "It is written" means that God has made a revelation; men wrote it down; and, the Word of God will last forever.

It is passive. That means that it just sits here in the Scripture. This declaration was made. It is indicative – a statement of fact. It is written in the Word of God. How do I know that the just shall live by faith? Again, because I have the authority of God's Word.

"The just" is the word "pikaios." That refers to the one who has God's absolute righteousness. There is only one way for a person to be able to say, "I am a just man," or "I am a just woman." And that is by God's absolute righteousness. It is not by human righteousness. That's something entirely different.

**Propitiation**

God's maximum love for a believer is based on propitiation. Remember that. God's love for you is not based upon the fact that you are a spiritual Christian, and aren't you glad? Just think that if God's love for us, and His treatment of us in love tomorrow was going to be dependent on how much time we logged in being a spiritual Christian, over against how much time we logged tomorrow in being a carnal Christian. Things would be bad. But I'm happy to tell you that God's love for you is based on propitiation. That is that God has had His justice and His righteousness satisfied at the cross of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the just are going to continue to be just because we have had the righteousness of Christ imputed to us on the basis of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done, and not on the basis of anything we have done.

**Eternal Security of the Believer**

This brings up something that is practically blasphemous. I find it hard not to view this as blasphemous anytime I find a religious group that suggests to people that they may lose their salvation. This is about as arrogant a thing as a human being can say. It shows not only monumental ignorance about how the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel, but it shows monumental ignorance concerning the fact that God's love is freed at the point of propitiation, not at the point that you and I behave ourselves according to some human standard of righteousness.

The result is that we shall live: "The just shall live." The Greek word for "live" is "zao." It is future. We shall live in the future. It is middle. It is to our personal benefit. It is indicative – a statement of fact. Of course, this has reference to our eternal life in heaven. How shall we live? The just shall (again) by faith ('ek pistis"). This is the same thing that we had back up here to begin with: "From faith." It is the same expression again, meaning "on the basis of faith." It is from the source of faith.

So, God's righteousness can only be understood by faith to those who have the faith to receive it. Salvation is secured by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Christian life is lived by faith in doctrine. Remember the two: Salvation is faith in Jesus Christ. But the Christian life is faith in Bible doctrine. And this is the only way that you and I become the just – those who are able to live as such.

**Martin Luther**

Of course, our minds cannot help when we read verse to go back to the days of the Reformation, and to that great man, one of the great reformers, Martin Luther. For it was this verse that caused the light of God's understanding relative to eternal life to burst into the soul of that man. I want to read a rather extensive passage from a book by Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse, in his series on Romans, volume one. He, in turn, is quoting from a man named Boreham of Australia. This is such an excellent presentation of what Martin Luther went through, and I think it will help project you back into the Middle Ages, those dark ages where that blanket of spiritual darkness rested upon all of humanity, and what he went through in trying to come to the understanding of the things that we have taught in this session.

Mind you that he knew Hebrew, and he knew Greek. He spent his days studying the chained Bible, and he did all kinds of things to himself physically. He was reaching out with everything a man could reach out with in order to find peace for his soul, and in order to find conviction, such that: "I have the righteousness of God." He knew that unless you have God's righteousness, you can never enter about heaven.

So, I read to you: "It goes without saying that the text that made Martin Luther made history with a vengeance. When, through its mystical but mighty ministry, Martin Luther entered the newness of life, the face of the world was changed. It was as though all the windows of Europe had been suddenly thrown open, and the sunshine came streaming in everywhere. The destiny of empires was turned that day into a new channel. Carlisle has a stirring and dramatic in which he shows that every nation under heaven stood or fell according to the attitude that it assumed toward Martin Luther. 'I call this Luther a true, great man,' he exclaimed. He is great in intellect; great in courage; great affection and integrity – one of our most lovable and gracious men. He is great, not as a hewn monolith is great, but as an alpine mountain is great – so simple; honest; spontaneous, not setting himself up to be great, but there for quite another purpose than the purpose of being great; a mighty man.

"He says again, 'What will all emperors, popes, and potentates in comparison, his like to claim as a beacon over long centuries and epics of the world.' The whole world and its history was waiting for this man. And elsewhere, he declares that the moment in which Luther defied the wrath of the Diet of Worms was the greatest moment in the history of men.

**The Just Shall Live by Faith**

"Here then was the man. What was the text that made him? Let us visit a couple of very interesting European libraries. Here in the convent library at Erfurt, we are shown an exceedingly famous and beautiful picture. It represents Luther as a young monk of four and twenty, pouring in the early morning over a copy of the Scriptures to which a bit of broken chains hanging. The dawn is steeling through the open lattice, illuminating both the open Bible and the eager face of its reader. And on the page that the young monk so intensely studies are to be seen the words: 'The just shall live by faith.' The just shall live by faith. The just shall live by faith. These, then, are the words that made the world all over again.

"And now leaving the convent library at Erfurt, let us visit another library: the library at Rudolstadt. For here, in a glass case, we shall discover a manuscript that will fascinate us. It is a letter in the handwriting of Dr. Paul Luther, the reformer's youngest son. In the year 1544, we read, 'My late dearest father, in the presence of us all, narrated the whole story of his journey to Rome. He acknowledged with great joy that in that city, through the Spirit of Jesus Christ, he had come to the knowledge of the truth of the everlasting gospel.'

"And the reformer's son continues the story: 'In the city of Rome, there is the Cathedral church of St John of Lateran. In it is a famous staircase built in three sections. Or rather, there is an ancient staircase with two parallel staircases; one on either side. People walk up the staircases to the left and to the right, but on the one in the center, pilgrims on their knees clung painfully, step-by-step, reciting prayers as they go. On two or three of the stairs, there is a covering of plate glass through which can be seen red stains. At these steps, the anguished pilgrims stooped and kissed the glass over the stains. A late tradition says that this middle staircase came from Pilate's hall in Jerusalem, and that these stains are from the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. It should go without saying, of course, that the archeology and architecture would never accept the claim to be true.'

"'Hundreds and hundreds of years after the time of Christ, the Crusaders went off to the Holy Land, and every one of them was supposed to bring back some relic or other. So many pieces of the supposed true cross were brought back that one of the high church dignitaries said that the cross had the power of multiplying itself. But men who know the grains of wood say that there are supposed pieces of the true cross in Spain alone that are made from half a dozen varieties of trees. The supposed staircase is of the same origin. But poor pilgrims have been weeping their way up its steps for hundreds of years.

"'I have stood on one of the side staircases and watched them as they came, with anguish and grief upon their faces. But it was a place of great joy to me as I stood there. I remember that one man reached the middle of the staircase and thought of the text which we have before us today: 'The just shall live by faith. The just shall live by faith.' It was Martin Luther who was reciting prayers there when the Holy Spirit broke in on his mind with the glorious words of the text: 'The just shall live by faith. The just shall live by faith. He leaped to his feet and he went on his way rejoicing'

"The story in the library at Rudolstadt, in the handwriting of his son, concludes: 'Thereupon, he ceased his prayers; return to Wittenberg; and, took this as the chief foundation of his doctrine.' The picture in the one library and the manuscript in the other have told us all we desire to know: 'The just shall live by faith.' The words do not flash or glitter. Like the ocean, they do not give any indication upon the surface of the profundities and mysteries that lie concealed beneath. 'The just shall live by faith,' cries the prophet Habakkuk. 'The just shall live by faith,' says Paul, addressing a letter to the greatest of the European churches. 'The just shall live by faith,' he says again in his letter to the greatest of the Asiatic churches. 'The just shall live by faith,' says the letter of the epistle to the Hebrews, addressing himself to Jews.

"It is as though it were the sum and substance of everything: to be proclaimed by prophets in the old dispensation; and, echoed by apostles in the new; to be translated into all languages, and transmitted to every section of the habitable earth. Indeed, Bishop Lightfoot as good as says that the words represent the concentration and epitome of all revealed religion. 'The whole Law,' he says, 'was given to Moses in 613 precepts. Dated in the 15th psalm brings them all within the compass of 11. Isaiah reduces them to six; Micah to three; Isaiah, in a later passage, to two; but, Habakkuk condenses them all into one: 'The just shall live by faith.'

"And this string of monosyllables that sums up everything that is sent to everybody: the old world's text; the new world's texts; the prophet's texts; the Jews text; the European's text; the Asiatic's text – everybody's text is in a special and peculiar sense Martin Luther's text. He made that discovery in the library at Erfurt and Rudolstadt. And we shall see as we proceed, find abundant evidence to confirm us in that conclusion.

"For, strangely enough, the text that echoed itself three times in the New Testament echoes itself three times also in the experience of Luther. It met him at Wittenburg; it met him at Bologna; and, it finally mastered him at Rome. It was at Wittenburg that the incident occurred which, we have already seen, transferred to the painter's canvas. In the retirement of his quiet cell, while the world was still wrapped in slumber, he pours over the epistle to the Romans. Paul's quotation from Habakkuk strangely captivates him: 'The just shall live by faith. The just shall live by faith.'

"'This precept,' says the historian, 'fascinates him. For the just then,' Luther says to himself, 'there was a life different from that of other men. And this life is the gift of faith.' This promise to which he opens all of his heart, as if God had placed it there, especially for him, unveils to him, the mystery of the Christian life. For years afterwards, in the midst of his numerous occupations, he fancies that he still hears the words repeating themselves over and over again: 'The just shall live by faith. The just shall live by faith.'

"Years pass. Luther travels. In the course of his journey, he crosses the Alps. He is entertained at a Benedictine convent at Bologna, and is there overtaken by a serious sickness. His mind relapses into utmost darkness and dejection: to die, thus, under a burning sky in a foreign land. He shudders at the thought. The sense of his sinfulness troubles him. This prospect of judgment fills him with dread. But at the very moment at which those terrors reach their highest pitch, the words that had already struck at Wittenburg recur forcibly to his memory, and enliven his soul like a ray from heaven: 'The just shall live by faith. The just shall live by faith.'

"'Thus restored and comforted,' the record concludes, 'he soon regains his health and resumes his journey.'

"The third of these experiences, the experience narrated in that fireside conversation, of which the manuscript at Rudolstadt has told us, befalls him at Rome. Wishing to obtain an indulgence promised by the Pope to all who shall ascend the so-called Pilate's staircase on their knees, the good Saxon monk is painfully creeping up those steps, which he is told were miraculously transported from Jerusalem to Rome. Whilst he is performing this meritorious act, however, he thinks he hears the voice of thunder crying, as at Wittenburg and Bologna: 'The just shall live by faith. The just shall live by faith.' These words, which had twice before struck him like the voice of an angel from heaven, resound unceasingly and powerfully within him. He rises in amazement from the steps up which he is dragging his body. He shudders at himself. He is ashamed at seeing to what a depth superstition plunged him. He flies far from the scene of his folly.

"Thus, thrice in the New Testament, and thrice in the life of Luther, the text speaks with singular appropriateness and effectiveness. 'This powerful text,' remarks Merle D'Aubigne, 'has a mysterious influence on the life of Luther.' It was a creative sentence, both for the reformer and for the Reformation. It was in these words that God then said, 'Let there be light, and there was light.'

"It was the unveiling of the face of God. Until this great transforming text flashed its light into the soul of Luther, his thought of God was a pagan thought. And the pagan thought is an unjust thought, an unworthy thought, a cruel thought. Look at this Indian devotee! From head to foot he bears the marks of torture that he is inflicted upon his body in his frantic efforts to give pleasure to his God. His back is a tangle of scars. The flesh has been lacerated by the pitiless hooks by which he has swung himself on the terrible churuka. Iron spears have been repeatedly run through his tongue. His ears are torn to ribbons.

"What does it mean? It can only mean that he worships a fiend. His God loves to see him in anguish. His cries of pain are music to the ears of the deity whom he adores. This ceaseless orgy of torture is his futile endeavor to satisfy the idol's lust for blood. Luther made precisely the same mistake? To his sensitive mind, every thought of God was a thing of terror.

"'When I was young,' he tells us, 'it happened that at Eisleben, on Corpus Christi Day, I was walking with the procession when suddenly the sight of the holy sacrament, which was carried by Dr. Staupitz, so terrified me that a cold sweat covered my body, and I believed myself dying of terror.' All through his days he proceeds upon the assumption that God gloats over his misery. His life is a long, drawn-out agony. He creeps like a shadow along the galleries of the cloister, the walls echoing with his dismal moanings. His body wastes to a skeleton. His strength ebbs away. On more than one occasion, his brother monks find him prostrate on the convent floor, and pick him up for dead. And all the time he thinks of God as One who can find delight in these continuous torments. 'The just shall live by faith,' he says to himself, 'by penance and by pain. The just shall live by fasting. The just shall live by fear.'

"'The just shall live by fear,' Luther mutters to himself every day of his life.

"'The just shall live by faith,' says the text that breaks upon him like a light from heaven. 'By fear, by fear. By faith, by faith.' ...

"With the coming of text, Luther passes form the realm of fear into the realm of faith. It is like passing from the rigors of an Arctic night into the sunshine of a summer day; it is like passing from a crowded city slum into the fields where the daffodils dance and the linnets sing; it is like passing into a new world; it is like entering Paradise. Yes, it is like entering paradise. The expression is Luther's. 'Before those words broke upon my mind,' he says, 'I hated God, and was angry with Him because, not content with frightening us sinners by the Law and by the miseries of life, He still further increased our torture by the gospel. But when, by the Spirit of God, I understood these words: 'The just shall live by faith! The just shall live by faith!' – then I felt born-again like a new man, I entered through the open doors into the very Paradise of God.

"'Henceforth,' he says again, 'I saw the beloved and holy Scriptures with other eyes. The words that I had previously detested, I began from that hour to value and to love as the sweetest and most consoling words in the Bible. In very truth this text was to me the true gate of Paradise – an open door to the very Paradise of God. This text was to me the true gate of Paradise."

I think that's an excellent summary of what Luther went through. But remember that for 1,200 years, from the time of the fall of the Roman Empire until Luther got off his knees on that staircase and turned around and walked back down and said, "What am I doing going up these stairs saying these prayers, when Habakkuk and Paul say that 'The just shall live by faith?'" Until that happened, there were millions of people who went through Luther's tortures, and who reached out for a God that they simply could not find because He just wasn't fair to them. Why not? Because the Bible was a closed and a chained book. Finally, men were able to reach out with the knowledge of the truth that the just shall live by faith, and that God can do this.

People always thought that somehow their human righteousness (and that's what this example illustrates – the human righteousness) had to get them into good standing with God. And then, hopefully, that God could go the rest of the way. To this day, a Roman Catholic will tell you, "Oh, yes, I believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for me. But I also believe that I must add my own efforts. I can't just leave it all up to God." I've had people look at me, and they have thought that they have said a very noble thing: "I wouldn't think of leaving it all up to God. I have to pay, because I did the wrong." That is the very thing that Luther thought.

And how different is this from what any heathen does: the heathen who punishes himself; the heathen who marks up his body; the heathen who takes his baby child (his baby son, or his baby daughter), and puts him upon a blood sacrifice to some heathen god. What difference is it? None whatsoever.

Luther was a splendid example of religion. The thing that Luther was wrong about was as to what God hated. What God hates is religion, because it is Satan's creation. And this is the thing that God despised in Luther. It was his religion which God rejected. But Luther himself – God loved him as he loves us.

So, now I hope you have a better picture of the stable ground upon which we rests. We are grounded upon something that God has done. It is something that God has provided. Therefore, it is something that cannot be shot out from under us. No matter what we do, He's going to come through.

The problem is how we will come through. We can enter heaven poverty struck; or, we can enter heaven with great, fantastic eternal rewards to be received there. It also makes a difference as to how we're going to live here. The just shall live by faith. Sooner or later, most everybody comes to the point in life where they are just pretty well fed-up with how they're living their lives. If you haven't had that experience, I can guarantee you it's going to come. And the farther you are from living by faith on the principles of the Word of God, the bigger the collapse is going to be when it come. Sooner or later, you're going to stand off and take a look at yourself, and they will come over you a spirit of loathing, depending on how far away you are from living by faith.

That not only means that you enter eternal life by faith, but it means that you go on in faith: "from faith, into faith." That is what God is offering, and that is what He's calling us to. But just as nobody can get to heaven until somebody gives them the gospel, so nobody can advance in happiness in the Christian life until somebody gives you doctrine.

So, take care: lest you be indifferent; or, lest you be contemptuous for the very thing that God has given you in order to bring you maximum happiness; maximum productivity; maximum fruitfulness; and, maximum joy in your life. Sooner or later, you're going to be there – some of you sooner than others. Some of you who are young are going to die before some of us who are older. Sooner or later, you're going to be in His presence. Somebody in this room is next in line to enter the Lord's presence. When you do, just as salvation is a settled issue for the unbeliever, so, your rewards and your eternal blessings are going to be a settled issue.

The just shall live by faith. I don't want you to dismiss this lightly as saying, "Well, I'm saved. I don't have Luther's problem. I'm not trying to kiss some glass-covered stains of the cross of Christ, because you do have the other part of the verse: that you shall live in faith. From faith, into faith – that's the full formula. May God give us the respect for the Word of God so that He can do what His love wants to do for us.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1975

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