Our Sin Became Righteousness

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[0:00] Jesus, we do receive everything that we have from your hand. We come again in awe at the one who hung on a tree in our place, died despite being life himself, but rose.

Everything that was wrong undone, sadness gone away, life reigning forevermore, he's alive. We come again to see it, Jesus, that you on that rugged cross died for us, but are now alive forevermore, victorious, king over everything.
Amen. And our hearts respond in worship, oh God. Thank you. Amen. Amen, friends.
Why don't you take a seat? My name's Tim, I'm part of the team here at Harvest Church. We're going to be opening the Bible together. However, if you've got a Bible with you, if you want to turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 5, I'll be opening that in just a moment or two.
It might take me slightly longer than usual to get to it, but don't worry, we are going there. We're just starting a series today. If you're usually part of the church, this feels normal. If you're visiting today, you don't really know what I'm talking about.
[1:32] But kind of through Lent, we are thinking about seven things that happened on the cross. And the one that I'm talking about today, the first one, the one in some ways that becomes the bedrock of everything else we'll talk about, is our sin became righteousness.

Talking about the idea of substitution, standing in someone else's place. Have you ever been asked to stand in someone else's place?
I mean, it probably happens, right? It happens in the workplace. Lots and lots of times in my life, a boss is away or something, and they've said, could you just stand in for me doing this task? It's quite common in one sense, but it always happens upward.
Right? It's like someone who is in one sense above me says, could you just do this for me, be me in this setting? It's not going to come for it, it happened downward. Where you become less, but do something smaller.
Take on something that is, as it were, beneath you. That's not common. It doesn't sound very pleasant. There's a famous old war film called To End All Wars.
[2:47] Some of you will know it well. Set in the Second World War. Kind of in the Pacific theatre. Near the bridge, or excuse me, near the River Kwai.

The other famous film set there. But about prisoners of war. Film and a book. And these prisoners of war in Japanese prisoner of war camps called themselves forsaken men.
It was awful in every way you could imagine. The kind of life that they were being forced to live. They hated their captors.
Understandably so. And you read their accounts. And what they say is eventually hate died. And it was replaced by black despair. Because there was no hope.
And then there's this famous story that immortalised in that film and book. Where they've been doing the various work that they're supposed to do. In the war camp building roads, building bridges.
[3:52] And one day the Japanese guards are very angry because a shovel is missing. And they tell them, Unless one of you steps forward and tells me which one of you stole on the shovel, we're going to kill all of you right now.

And they mean it. Because it's that kind of place and they're those kind of people. And so, after a moment, one man steps forward and says, It was me. I stole the shovel. And they beat him to death.
Later that day, they notice that all the shovels are there. There was no missing shovel. It was an innocent man who stepped forward in order to rescue all of the rest of his compatriots.

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The prisoners of war were stunned when they realised what he'd done. This friend of theirs. And it led them to think on Jesus.
It led many of them to faith in Jesus. It led them to treat each other with kindness in that most awful of places. And the most remarkable thing is that after the war, when they were freed, it led them to forgive their captors.
[5:05] Let me read to you. It says, in the Bible, 2 Corinthians, chapter 5. I'm going to read you one sentence today. It is, I think, possibly the most beautiful sentence that has ever been written.

1 Corinthians 5, verse 21. So, excuse me, 2 Corinthians 5, verse 21. Let me just read that again. For our sake. For our sake. He made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.
What Paul, who wrote that, is saying is that this man Jesus, that's who he's talking about, as is clear in the sentences I haven't read just before it, he knew no sin.
He was the only man who's ever lived to have not done anything wrong. But he became sin for us.
[6:22] It's what Martin Luther, the theologian, calls the great exchange. This idea that the only sinless man who's ever lived gets, if we trust him, like Larissa's described, if we trust him, he gets my sin and I get his righteousness.

And I don't really have to do anything to get that. It's an exchange. What happened on the cross, my sin became his righteousness.
Wow. What I'd just like to spend the next few minutes doing is just, what does that mean? What does that mean? My sin.
Exchange for his righteousness. Start with, what are we talking about when we talk about sin? We're talking about, in essence, mine and your inability to stand before God because we're guilty. We're talking about the idea that the root of hell in all of our hearts, and we don't like to think of it like that, but the root of hell in all of our hearts causes us to do things that are themselves wrong.
[7:37] And I imagine that if we think about it, however we think about ourselves, and most of us want to think that we're kind of good, probably better than that person over there, but at least kind of good, but we still know some kind of pull within us to do things that we reckon are wrong.

even if, in our judgment, the transgressions, the things that we do that are wrong are quite small. We can certainly point to other people who do much worse things. It's not hard, is it, to turn the telly?
But you watch the news, you'll see people who you're like, obviously they are worse than me. Maybe. But we're still knowing ourselves that pull towards doing things that we ourselves don't think are right.
But that is, in essence, what sin is, except the Bible says it's worse than you think it is. Let me read you another story of another substitution, much like that guard, excuse me, that prisoner of war by the river Kwai, from one of the Gospels.
It's from the book of Matthew. This is just before Jesus dies. This is in Matthew 27. So this is, Jesus has been arrested, and he's been through a number of trials which are silly and mock, and people laugh at him, but none of it seems to really stand up legally.
[8:54] And he stood before this Roman governor who thinks, I don't know that this guy has actually done anything wrong. I'm not really sure what to do next, because it's really politically expedient to kill him. But, hmm, what do I do about that?

And then Matthew 27, verse 15, it says, Now, at the feast, the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. So he's thinking, easy, this guy seems innocent, let's get them to let him go, because that kind of works for me.
And they then, excuse me, and they had then a notorious prisoner named Barabbas. So when they gathered, Pilate, that's the governor, said to them, Who do you want me to release for you, Barabbas, or Jesus, or Jesus, who is called Christ?
For he knew that it was out of envy that they delivered him up. Besides, while he was sitting in the judgment seat, his wife had sent word to him, had nothing to do with that righteous man, for I had suffered much because of him today in a dream.
Now, the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor again said to them, Which of the two do you want me to release for you? And they said, Barabbas.

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[10:04] Pilate said to them, Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ? And they all said, Let him be crucified. And he said, Why? What evil has he done?

But they shouted all the more, Let him be crucified. So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, I am innocent of this man's blood.
See to it yourselves. And all the people answered, His blood be on us and our children. Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus delivered him to be crucified. So a murderer is acquitted instead of Jesus, and Jesus is condemned to be crucified in this place.
In one sense, it's a piece of political theatre at the time, because they're trying to engineer those who are whipping up the crowd the death of Jesus, sure. But on another hand, it's a picture to us of what's happening on the cross, that Jesus would die in the place of a murderer.
That's what happened to us, if you trust him, as Lewis has described. And the natural thing to think next is, but I'm not a murderer, Tim. Sure, well, I mean, and I hope that is true.
[11:25] But what the Bible is saying is, you're worse than you think you are. We might not live up to our own standards, but generally think we're doing better than a lot of other people around us. But realistically, the Bible says, you're a lot worse than you think you are.

You have no standing before God. You do not live up to his standards. It is easy to find someone worse than you, as though that let us off the hook.
When I was at school, it used to be a common thing that they got us to do, to play something called the life raft game. I've sent this to a few people and they don't remember it, so maybe this was my strange school. But let me describe it to you.
You'd be given a kind of, you'd be told that the scenario is that a ship is sinking. And there is a life raft and it does not have enough seats on it. You know, kind of very Titanic. And you'd be given a list of the people who are on the boat and a little bit of information about them.
You know, this person's about to cure cancer and this is a mother with a young baby and they're really awful for whatever, but you know, quite dramatic descriptions of people, but a list of people and told, they can't all fit on the life raft, you're in the list too, who's getting on?
[12:36] I'm not entirely sure what it was supposed to teach us. We did it a lot. Some kind of moral reasoning, I imagine. But there's something in it because essentially what you're asked to do is go, who deserves to live and where am I in the pecking order?

And put yourself on the boat or not on the list. I actually think we live our whole lives playing the life raft game. Not often consciously but kind of subconsciously.
Looking around at everyone else thinking, where do I stack up? Where am I in the list? I'm doing better than them. I'm probably not doing better than them, but I am doing better than them. So I'm not that bad really.
Our natural thought is always to think of the person who is worse than us and they're not hard to find, let's be honest. Particularly in the days of global news and all the rest of it, it's not hard to find someone you can point at and go, well they're evil and I'm doing better than them.
Sure. But we're always playing this thing where where do you stack up? And what the Bible says is none of you deserve to get on the life raft but the only person who does has given up his place for you.
[13:44] It says that you don't have the standing before God to get on the life raft. That's what we call righteousness. The standing before God that lets you get on the life raft. The only person who has it says you can have mine.

And then he gives it to each person who trusts in him. We're desensitized in that sense to our own evil. But Jesus says he will bear our sin.
He will bear our alienation from God. He will bear the weight of our lostness. He says that if you trust him your guilt can be removed.
Which means, friends, those of you who know him which is most of the room, when you feel guilty because you did something wrong that you actually did, you don't have to.
That's remarkable, right? You can, in your heart, cast it on the cross because Jesus has died for that thing that you did wrong that was wrong. Taking away your guilt.
[14:50] And then you can tell your soul you don't need to feel guilty anymore, soul. You sometimes have to because it kind of sits in you like, oh, I feel guilty. You kind of have to tell yourself. No need to feel guilty anymore.

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Jesus has died for that. I mean that. If we're honest, if we look at that from the outside and if you're quite used to the faith and lots of you have been following Jesus for a long time that sounds very normal but if you look at that from the outside that's wild.
Feels like a get out of jail free card. That's right. The Bible says it is that wild actually. It says that that free gift is one of the things that causes us to live right.
Yeah. But that it is that free that you can in the face of your just guilt for things you actually did wrong go put it on the cross and then Jesus died for it not you.
And then you can live free of it forever more. And that actually means even your own experience of your guilt can go away. Because you're a free person following God.
[16:02] It's remarkable. Friends, if you're a follower of Jesus let's live like free people. You don't need to experience guilt. I mean, yeah, sure. Jesus calls us to live better. He calls us to live righteously.

He says, maybe don't do that anymore. Sure. And then he gives us the power to actually change in order to be able to do that. But it starts with going, actually I don't need to feel guilty about it. Because it's like Jesus died for it.
Well, he did die for it. I don't have to. Here's the thing. It gets better than that. Because I said, that passage I read said, for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin.
That's how far we've got. So that in him we might become the righteousness of God. It's better than just no guilt. Because it's not just no more sin.
It's an exchange. It's my sin, his righteousness. My lack of standing, his standing before God. So what does that mean? Well, imagine the scene.
[17:09] You've been invited to a party. It's at a middle class English person's house. So you know you're supposed to turn up with something in your hand. And it is supposed to be either a bottle of wine or a bunch of flowers because that is the middle class English code, right?

Some of you from other parts of the world have just sort of started to get your head around that. Or from other English cultures or other British cultures, again, it's very odd. But that's the code, right? You turn up, bottle of wine or a bunch of flowers.
That's how people know that you like them when you turn up at the door. Imagine you've turned up at the door for this event and you have something in your hand because you know you're supposed to bring a gift but it's not the required bottle of wine or a bunch of flowers.
Instead, it is a little plastic bag full of some dog poo. And you go to your and you know you do the little dance you come in and you're supposed to come in and take off your shoes and coat and then oh do I need so much shoes off and oh here's this for you and all of that that you do the little English dance where no one wants to look grateful for anything but you sort of want to somehow indicate that anyway.
Again, some of you are like we come from cultures where we're just not weird. That's good. But you say you don't have all that. You've got the doggy bag and they're sort of wondering did you did you pick it up outside?
[18:19] You wanted to put it in the bin? What's the why are you trying to give it to me? What is going on here? There's a wheelie bin outside that would have been a much more natural place to put this but you're like it's for you. And because you're middle classed in English they pass to a smile on their face and they go thank you.

I know just where to put it. Right, it's like that you've turned up at the party with the horrible thing but what happens is that you receive glorious welcome and the host says yes, thank you I will take that and deal with it.
Now let me you look like you've been walking through the mud let's give you my clothes let's clean you up that's what we're saying when we say sin for righteousness we're saying not just Jesus takes away but I turn up at the door with something disgusting that nobody wants in their house myself and that Jesus then says thank you just what I wanted in you come I'm going to sort you out and get you cleaned up puts you in good clothes so that you walk into the party and you're oh, I belong here I've turned up with the right thing I don't really understand this place but I'm following it's like I fit in and he's just made me look like I fit in he's put me in the best clothes he's introducing me to everyone as though I'm the person that they should be meeting he's given me standing that's what righteousness is standing like it's a cultural kind of social thing standing the right to stand in that place the fact that you fit and it's standing before God so it's like you fit in God's house you fit in God's party you fit right before his throne you're supposed to be there that's what he's taking all of

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your mess and he's instead exchanging it for the right to stand before God in fact it gets even better than that because it says in him we might become the righteousness of God which is
I think the Bible keeps saying that we are in Christ and so what that means is it's not just like he tidies you up a bit and then it's like introducing people to you it's actually when the father looks at you he looks at you through Jesus as though everywhere in that party you're going around you're just sort of standing in front of you so that everyone keeps telling you wonderful things that are actually about him but they keep saying them to you because that's what happens the father looks at you as though you were Jesus and he speaks to you through Jesus it's not that someone's tricked him he knows exactly what's going on and he's delighted by it but he's speaking to you as though you were Christ who does the father love most in the entire universe the son so that means you're his favourite if you trust Jesus you're his favourite because he speaks to you as though you are the son so righteousness turns out to not just be standing as though like oh I kind of have the right to be in in the king's court or something no no no no he speaks to you like you're his beloved son he chooses to see
Jesus and who's the one person who is allowed to go to a king in the middle of the night and like tap him on the shoulder and be really annoying and say can I have a glass of water he's a child which means that the father this great king of the world when he looks at you and relates to you if you trust in Jesus because he looks at you through the son that means that you are actually the kind of person who not just has like standing in his court and okay I'm kind of allowed to be around here you're the one that's and be like I'm thirsty and he's like of course and he comes up and gets you a drink and he sorts you out that's how God relates to you that's how God sees you that's what it means to say your sin becomes righteousness all the way in and you become strangely enough in that we're told we become free to choose the good because you might think this is just a recipe for doing whatever you like well that's no not really this is how you become free to choose to do good things but the bible never says do right things it says live like who you are so you've been made righteous in
[22:55] Christ if you follow him live like it it's not here's a list to match up to it's I've completely changed who you are now go and live like that's true it's much easier it's actually possible and it means that you can approach God himself boldly boldly you can be the kind of person like the little kid who goes and wakes the parents up in the night and says I've got a problem which is often I don't know there's a little monster under the bed or something it's not a real problem some of the time but to them it's a real problem and you can go and tell the Lord about it and he'll be like of course let me come and be with you often how do you fix the little kid with the monster under the bed you give him a hug right so even when our problems aren't things that we need fixing the father comes to be with us and to love us and to comfort us you can approach boldly you can come to God not only do you not have to feel guilty but you can in all confidence walk all the way into the presence of

God and be like I belong here he's for me not quite sure what else I'd be afraid of off we go your stinking mess has become the choicest of gifts but you didn't buy them maybe it's even like I talked about changing it for clothes but you turn up with a doggy bag and Jesus is like no no no I'll have that here are the right gifts here's a really fancy bottle of wine and a bunch of flowers you're going to look like you did double effort in we go and that's what he does for us you didn't buy them but everyone treats you that's the way it works in the gospel that's the way it works in the Christian faith you didn't do any of it but he treats you like you did that's really good news what we're going to do now two things one Andrew in a little bit after we've sung a little bit more if that's new to you and you're like I kind of want in he's going to give you an opportunity to get in but what we're all going to do now is the band are going to come we're going to sing a really old hymn that ends on the line bold I approach the eternal throne because we can boldly approach him now a few lines in this hymn you know oh it's slightly old
English but essentially the whole story of it is what I just preached wonder at the fact that Jesus would stand in our place wonder at the fact that that means our sin is paid for wonder at the fact that means you get to be alive before you were dead and wonder at the fact you get to boldly approach him that's really good news why don't we stand together if you're able and the band will lead us again Thank you.

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