

~Other Speakers G-L: Harry Ironside:

THERE is a very remarkable statement found in the book of Isaiah, chapter thirty-two, verse 17: "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever."

Assurance forever! Is it not a wonderfully-pleasing expression? Assurance not for a few days, or weeks, or months - nor yet for a few years, or even a lifetime - but forever! It is this blessed assurance that God delights to impart to all who come to Him as needy sinners seeking the way of life.

Two words are employed in this verse that are intimately related - peace and assurance. Yet how many deeply-religious people there are in the world who scarcely know the meaning of either term. They are honestly seeking after God. They are punctilious about their religious duties, such as reading the Scriptures, saying their prayers, attending church, partaking of the sacrament, and supporting the cause of Christ. They are scrupulously honest and upright in all their dealings with their fellowmen, endeavoring to fulfil every civic and national responsibility, and to obey the golden rule. Yet they have no lasting peace, nor any definite assurance of salvation. I am persuaded that in practically every such instance the reason for their unquiet and unsettled state is due to a lack of apprehension of God's way of salvation.

Though living seven centuries before Calvary, it was given to Isaiah to set forth in a very blessed manner the righteousness of God as later revealed in the gospel. This is not to be wondered at for he spoke as he was moved by the Holy Spirit.

The key word of his great book, often called the fifth gospel, is the same as in the Epistle to the Romans - the word, "righteousness." And I would urge the reader to meditate on this word for a little and see how it is used in the Holy Scriptures.

The Dying Lawyer

A lawyer lay dying. He had attended church all his life but was not saved. He was known to be a man of unimpeachable integrity. Yet as he lay there facing eternity, he was troubled and distressed. He knew that upright as he had been before men, he was a sinner before God. His awakened conscience brought to his memory sins and transgressions that had never seemed so heinous as then, when he knew that shortly he must meet his Maker.

A friend put the direct question, "Are you saved?" He replied in the negative, shaking his head sadly. The other asked, "Would you not like to be saved?" "I would indeed," was his reply, "if it is not already too late. But," he added almost fiercely, "I do not want God to do anything wrong in saving me!"

His remark showed how deeply he had learned to value the importance of righteousness. The visitor turned to his Bible and there read how God had Himself devised a righteous way to save unrighteous sinners. The fact is that He has no other possible way of saving anybody. If sin must be glossed over, in order that the sinner may be saved, he will be forever lost. God refuses to compromise His own character for the sake of anyone, much as He yearns to have all men to be saved.

It was this that stirred the soul of Luther, and brought new light and help after long, weary months of groping in the darkness, trying in vain to save himself in conformity to the demands of blind leaders of the blind. As he was reading the Latin Psalter, he came across David's prayer, "Save me in thy righteousness." Luther exclaimed, "What does this mean? I can understand how God can damn me in His righteousness, but if He would save me it must surely be in His mercy!" The more he meditated on it, the more the wonder grew. But little by little the truth dawned upon his troubled soul that God Himself had devised a righteous method whereby He could justify unrighteous sinners who came to Him in repentance and received His word in faith.

Isaiah stresses this great and glorious truth throughout his marvellous Old Testament unfolding of the gospel plan. In unsparing severity, the prophet portrays man's utterly lost and absolutely hopeless condition, apart from divine grace. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment" (Isa. 1:5,6). It is surely a revolting picture, but nevertheless it is true of the unsaved man as God sees him. Sin is a vile disease that has fastened upon the very vitals of its victim. None can free himself from its pollution, or deliver himself from its power.

A Sure Remedy

But God has a remedy. He says, "Come now, and let us reason together, said the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (v. 18). It is God Himself who can thus purge the leper from all his uncleanness, and justify the ungodly from all his guilt. And He does it, not at the expense of righteousness, but in a perfectly righteous way.

"'Tis in the Cross of Christ we see
How God can save, yet righteous be;
'Tis in the Cross of Christ we trace
His righteousness and wondrous grace.
The sinner who believes is free,
Can say, the Saviour died for me;
Can point to the atoning blood
And say, That made my peace with God."

So it is Isaiah who, above all other prophetic writers, sets forth the work of the Cross. He looks on by the eye of faith to Calvary, and there he sees the Holy Sufferer dying for sins not His own. He exclaims, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD (Jehovah) hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:5,6).

Have you ever thoughtfully considered these remarkable statements? If not, I beg you to ponder over them now: It was Jesus that the Spirit of God brought before the mind of Isaiah. He would have you gaze upon Him, too. Take each clause separately and weigh its wondrous meaning:

"He was wounded for our transgressions." Make it personal! Put yourself and your own sins in there. Read it as though it said, "He was wounded for my transgressions." Do not get lost in the crowd. If there had never been another sinner in all the world, Jesus would have gone to the cross for you! Oh, believe it and enter into peace!

"He was bruised for our iniquities." Make it personal! Think what your ungodliness and your self-will cost Him. He took the blows that should have fallen upon you. He stepped in between you and God, as the rod of justice was about to fall. It bruised Him in your stead. Again, I plead, make it personal! Cry out in faith, "He was bruised for my iniquities."

Now go farther: "The chastisement of our peace was upon him." All that was necessary to make peace with God, He endured. "He made peace through the blood of his cross." Change the "our" to "my." "He made my peace."

"He bore on the tree
The sentence for me,
And now both the surety
And sinner are free."

Now note the last clause of this glorious verse, "With his stripes we are healed." Do you see it? Can you set to your seal that God is true, and cry exultingly, "Yes, I a poor sinner, I a lost, ruined soul, I who so richly deserved judgment, I am healed by His stripes"?

"We are healed by His stripes,
Wouldst thou add to the Word?
He Himself is our righteousness made.
The best robe of heaven He bids thee put on,
Oh, couldst thou be better arrayed?"

The Old Account Settled

It is not that God ignores our sins, or indulgently over-looks them; but on the cross all have been settled for. In Isaiah 53:6, He has balanced the books of the world. There were two debit entries:

"All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned every one to his own way."

But there is one credit item that squares the account:

"Jehovah hath laid on him (that is, on Jesus at the cross)
the iniquity of us all."

The first debit entry takes into account our participation in the fall of the race. Sheep follow the leader. One goes through a hole in the fence and all follow after. So Adam sinned and we are all implicated in his guilt. "Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

But the second entry takes into account our individual wilfulness. Each one has chosen to sin in his own way, so we are not only sinners by nature, but we are also transgressors by practice. In other words, we are lost - utterly lost. But "the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). By His sacrificial death on the cross, He has paid to outraged justice that which meets every charge against the sinner. Now in perfect righteousness God can offer a complete pardon and justification to all who trust His risen Son.

Thus "the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever." The troubled conscience can now be at rest. God is satisfied with what His Son has done. On that basis He can freely forgive the vilest sinner who turns in repentance to the Christ of the cross.

"The trembling sinner feareth
That God can ne'er forget;
But one full payment clear
His mem'ry of all debt;
Returning sons He kisses,
And with His robe invests;
His perfect love dismisses
All terror from our breasts."

He says to every believing soul, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" (Isa: 44:22). And again, "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins" (Isa. 43:25). You may never be able to forget the years of wandering, the many sins of which you have been guilty. But that which gives peace is the knowledge that God will never recall them again. He has blotted them from the book of His remembrance, and He has done it in righteousness, for the account is completely settled. The debt is paid!

Christ's Resurrection Gives Assurance

Christ's bodily resurrection is the divine token that all has been dealt with to God's satisfaction. Jesus bore our sins on the cross. He made Himself responsible for them. He died to put them away forever. But God raised Him from the dead, thereby attesting His good pleasure in the work of His Son. Now the blessed Lord sits exalted at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens. He could not be there if our sins were still upon Him. The fact that He is there proves that they are completely put away. God is satisfied!

"Payment He will not twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine."

It is this that gives quietness and assurance forever. When I know that my sins have been dealt with in such a way that God's righteousness remains untarnished, even as He folds me to His bosom, a justified believer, I have perfect peace. I know Him now as "a just God and a Saviour" (Isa. 45:21). He says, "I will bring near my righteousness;
it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry" (Isa. 46:13). What cheering words are these! He has provided a righteousness, His very own, for men who have none of their own! Gladly, therefore, do I spurn all attempts at self-righteousness, to be found in Him perfect and complete, clothed with His righteousness.

Every believer can say with the prophet, "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels" (Isa. 61:10).

"Clad in this robe, how bright I shine;

Angels have not a robe like mine."

It is given only to redeemed sinners to wear this garment of glory. Christ Himself is the robe of righteousness. We who trust Him are "in Christ"; we are "made the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor. 5:21). He is "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (I Cor. 1:30). If my acceptance depended on my growth in grace I could never have settled peace. It would be egotism of the worst kind to consider myself so holy that I could be satisfactory to God on the ground of my personal experience. But when I see that "He hath made us accepted in the beloved," every doubt is banished. My soul is at peace. I have quietness and assurance forever. I know now that only

**"That which can shake the Cross,
Can shake the peace it gave;
Which tells me Christ has never died,
Nor ever left the grave."**

As long as these great unchanging verities remain, my peace is unshaken, my confidence is secure. I have "assurance forever."

Dear, anxious, burdened soul, do you not see it? Can you not rest, where God rests, in the finished work of His blessed Son? If He is satisfied to save you by faith in Jesus, surely you should be satisfied to trust Him.