

“So That He Might Be Just”

BY JIM PERKINS

Most of us are familiar with Romans 3:23-25a:

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.

But, our focus here is on the following explanation:

This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. *Romans 3:25a-26*

“So that he might be just”...

To set the context for this, let's visit a vision had by Zechariah, during the post-exile restoration period. In Zechariah chapter 3:1-5:

Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to Satan, “The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?” Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, “Remove the filthy garments from him.” And to him he said, “Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments.” And I said, “Let them put a clean turban on his head.” So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by.

In this vision, Zechariah sees a scene in heaven, wherein Joshua, who was the high priest at the time, is standing before the throne of Jehovah, and Satan is in this courtroom, acting as adversary against Joshua, accusing him. Note in Revelation 12:9 (we will visit that scene shortly), both the words “Satan” (adversary), and “devil” (accuser) are used of him. I get the idea that Satan apparently had some right to stand before the throne of God and make accusations against humans (see Job). In this case, Joshua is pictured as standing before God's judgment seat in filthy garments. We understand from the context that that filth on Joshua was explained by his iniquity, or sin. Satan's accusations were true! However, the Lord rebuked Satan, and an angel simply clothed Joshua with pure vestments, and put a clean turban on his head.

I can only imagine Satan's response! Satan jumping up and down, yelling “UNFAIR!” This man belongs to me! You can't have him! He is a sinner! But, You, Jehovah, arbitrarily clothe him with clean garments and claim him for Yourself! That isn't JUSTICE! You can't have him! HE BELONGS TO ME!

And so, the scene was played out, through all of earth's history, over and over again: Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David ... Satan claimed his victims, God clothed them with righteousness, and kept them for Himself.

Now, there is a community in heaven, with onlookers (Eph. 3:10). Some of them might have thought that Satan had a point. After all, everyone knows that Joshua's sacrifices on the altar, the blood of bulls and goats, cannot take away his sins. It might be dangerous to even formulate such a thought about Jehovah, but maybe He wasn't an

absolutely just God after all. Romans 3:25 described God's "divine forbearance," wherein "he had passed over former sins." Perhaps this magnanimous grace of God was costly to His reputation for awhile. Did the Father in heaven pay a price for His love?

However, with the sacrifice of Jesus, God was shown to be "just." Let's explore this further: Revelation 12:7-12 says,

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸ but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. ¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

When I think of war in heaven, I'm tempted to think of Hollywood scenes. The Archangel Michael and Satan opposing one another, perhaps throwing lightning bolts at each other, a standoff where Michael's power seems to be equal to Satan's, but eventually Michael just has too much firepower for Satan.

However, if you look at verse 11, "they" conquered him. So, who were the "they"? Verse 10 tells us: "the brothers"!!

So, how did the "brothers" conquer the dragon and his angels, so that there was "no longer any place for them" (v. 8)

Verse 11 answers that question: they conquered him by two means...

1. the blood of the Lamb
2. the word of their testimony

We all understand the nature of the propitiation provided by the blood of the Lamb. Having been truly washed, in a sacrifice that is greater than our greatest sins, the accusations of Satan have no meaning. He had no place in that courtroom any more, no right to accuse. So, he was cast out.

The second part by which the brothers defeat Satan is the word of their testimony. What is that testimony? "They loved not their lives even to death."

You see, when Satan first tempted Eve, he got her to think that she could be "like God." He has done the same with each of us. At some point, each of us decided to raise ourselves up to be as big as God, and decide for ourselves which rules and regulations we wished to follow. So, when we defeated Satan, not only did we embrace the cleansing blood of Jesus, but we also "undid" that decision. We slayed ourselves, and subjected our wills to Him. The down payment on that "testimony" is manifested in baptism, wherein we were "crucified" with Christ. With those two weapons, the blood of Christ, and our ongoing commitment to love God more than our own lives, Satan has no right to accuse us. God has lovingly removed our filthy garments, clothed us with white garments, and claimed us for Himself forever. He is just!

Of course, we continue to “love not our own lives even unto death” every day, while the blood of Christ washes us in our failures. Here’s what the angel said to Joshua, at the close of the vision:

And the angel of the LORD solemnly assured Joshua, ⁷“Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. *Zechariah 3:6-7*

How is my “testimony” doing today?