

Christmas 2016: The Need for Jesus: Imputed Righteousness / COB / 12.25.16

[Gather up the children in front of the altar]

- † Sometimes I go into the children's classroom, and I am always impressed with how much they are learning and with their intelligent questions! So Children, I am going to ask you some questions today, and then I am going to show you something with these things on the table, ok?
 - † First Question: how many real gods are there? Just one!
 - Yet this one God has revealed himself to be how many distinct individuals? Our one God has revealed himself to be three distinct individuals: God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
 - When I say they are distinct, I mean that God the Father and Christ the Son of God are not the same person, they can talk to each other, they can do different things at the same time. Yet they are so unified in their character and will and whatever they are made of, which we call essence, that they are one God. Each is all of God, yet all three together are one God. That's really hard to understand, isn't it? That's ok. It is no surprise that God, who has always existed and who created all the universe, is beyond our understanding!
 - Since there are three individuals, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we say God is a what? Starts with a T... Trinity. Say that with me, "Trinity." That word means that God is three in one.
 - Which of the Trinity – the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit – came to earth and was born miraculously by the virgin Mary as the baby Jesus? The Son of God was born as Jesus on Christmas Day, good!
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- † Why do you think Jesus came?
 - This might surprise your parents, but it turns out that none of you children are perfect! Not one! All of us make mistakes, all of us do things that are wrong, even things we know are wrong! This is sin, when we go against the character or will of God.
 - Now here's the big problem: because we are not perfectly pure and righteous, God has to punish us, so we cannot go to Heaven. Now that's a scary thought. We need to fix this problem!
 - † Let's see if we can illustrate this problem and then find a solution.
 - We start out with a glass of pure, crystal clear, water. This is the way God designed us to be: pure and righteous, a reflection of his character. If you children were thirsty, would you drink this glass of pure water? Sure, it would be good, because it is pure water.
 - † The problem starts because we have two kinds of sin even before we are born! My wife – Miss LeeAnn – is pregnant with a baby girl; I love that baby girl, but she already suffers with two kinds of sin.
 - The first is called inherited sin. Say that with me: "inherited sin." Have you children heard of Adam and Eve? When Adam and Eve disobeyed God the first time, they suffered corruption in their human nature, like a spiritual illness that never got healed.

- This corruption has been passed down from parents to their children for thousands of years. All the adults in this room inherited this corruption from our parents and all you children inherited it from your parents, like a bad gene. We call this inherited sin. Have you ever had an impulse to do something bad? This is why: This is why: you have a corruption in your nature, so you do not perfectly reflect God's character.
 - Another issue is that God holds all of us guilty for the human race rebelling against him. We call this imputed sin; say that with me: "imputed sin." We call this imputed sin, because God imputes it to us, which means God accounts it to us as soon as we are conceived in the womb, just because we are descendants of Adam.
 - So even before we are born, we are not pure like God desired. We represent that with a few drops of soy sauce. Would you want to drink water with soy sauce in it? Yuck!
- † Once we are born, we make our own mistakes. When you are kind or you share with others, you children reveal the character of God in you, and we adults say, "what a sweet, godly, child!" But let's be honest, sometimes you instead reveal the corruption of your nature, like when you are selfish, you disobey your parents, or you are mean to someone. So we add a few more drops to the water, and it starts to get murky. Does it look extra tasty now? Double Yuck!
- Now I hope all you children will live a better life than I did. But if any of the adults here are like me, they made a mess of their lives at some point [add lots of soy] – I was a good child, but I struggled more as a teenager and had a tough decade in my twenties when I was not a godly man! and I still struggle sometimes with sin – so we become quite polluted.
 - This water looks really gross now, and that is how we look inside, spiritually. Every time we sin, do something bad, we get more polluted. This is what your soul looks like because of sin. This is our problem, right? We are tainted with sin, which means God will punish us and we will not end up with him in Heaven. We need a solution for this!
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- † In the adult church, we have been studying the biblical book of Philippians, verse by verse. In the city of Philippi, there was a cult – like a fake church – and they said if you did more good things and fewer bad things, then your obedience would lead you to become pure and righteous in God's sight.
- That was their proposed solution. Let's think this over. We can represent pouring out some of our sinfulness and adding some of the goodness of God, by pouring out some tainted water and adding some fresh water. If I continue this process, over and over, I can make the water lighter and lighter. But do you think the water will become perfectly pure again? No.
 - And that's why we don't try to fix our sin problem by ourselves. We can do more good things and do fewer bad things, and make ourselves into a better person than we were, but – just as with the water – we can never make ourselves perfectly pure and righteous, the way God designed us to be. You can still see a difference.
 - This is why the apostle Paul thought what the cult was teaching was so bad: they said you could become righteous enough through obedience to get to Heaven. But we see here we can never in our own power make ourselves into the righteous and pure person that we *need* to be to avoid God's punishment for sin. No matter how hard we try, we are still tainted, so we deserve God's punishment, we cannot fix our relationship with God, and thus we cannot spend eternity with God in Heaven.

- Now, you and I should try to be good and obedient, right? Of course we should. Don't tell your parents I said you shouldn't be good and obedient! But no matter how good and obedient we are, we can never earn our way to Heaven. We will always be like this glass of tainted water: we can become more and more pure, but we will never be perfectly pure and righteous.

† And that's why Jesus came, because we could not fix this problem ourselves. The Old Testament promised over and over that God would save his people, and that God would send a deliverer called the Messiah or Christ to save his people.

- So God the Father sent the Son of God to be born on Christmas day as Jesus, the savior, the one we call Messiah or Christ. Let's say "Christ" together: Jesus is the Christ! Jesus was both God and man. As a pure man, Jesus could be an acceptable sacrifice for us in the eyes of God the Father; as God the Son, the divine Son of God, Jesus was capable of bearing the punishment for all our sins.
- Jesus allowed himself to be crucified, and in that moment he took all the punishment from God that we deserve because of our sin! Then he was resurrected from the dead, to prove that he had victory over sin and death, and that he could offer us eternal life.

† What God asks is that we believe in this promise. If we put our faith in Jesus as our savior, God forgives us for being polluted. Here's why: since Jesus took our punishment for sin, God declares us to be as righteous as Jesus; in fact, God accounts to us the very righteousness of Jesus. We call that imputed righteousness; say that with me: "imputed righteousness." We call that imputed righteousness, because God imputes it, or accounts it, to us even though we don't deserve it.

- This is why Jesus came. He came to die for us, so we could be forgiven and declared righteous by God the Father. So even though we might still be polluted, God will see us as pure, so we can enter into a relationship with him and spend eternity with him.
- Last week in the adult church service, we read Paul's provocative statement that believers could rejoice in the Lord even though we suffer and struggle. The reason we can rejoice is because we know we are saved by Jesus through the grace gift of imputed righteousness!
- And that is why we celebrate Christmas. We celebrate that it was a miracle for the Son of God to come as one of us, one of the greatest miracles ever; but that was just the beginning! We also celebrate that, because he came, we now can have a relationship with God, experience spiritual life, and look forward to our struggles ending when we go to spend eternity with God.