Lord's Day 23 ~ The Marrow of the Gospel

1. THE LAW STOPS EVERY MOUTH (ROM. 3:20)

Paul's case in Romans 1–3: Gentiles guilty, Jews guilty, religious people guilty. **"By works of the law no human being will be justified."** The law exposes sin; it cannot make us righteous. Have you loved God with ALL your heart, soul, mind, strength? Loved your neighbor as yourself? HC Q60: conscience accuses me of violating God's commands, keeping none perfectly, and remaining inclined to evil. Even Christians can be "justified jerks!"

The problem: If our acceptance depends on how holy we have become, our conscience will never give us peace. We need a righteousness we cannot produce.

2. THE VERDICT, NOT YOUR CONDITION

Romans 4:5: God **"justifies the ungodly."** What? A holy Judge declares guilty sinners righteous? Justification is a **courtroom verdict**: the opposite of condemnation. God declares us righteous on account of Christ, not our weekly spiritual performance.

Justification is His once-for-all declaration; **sanctification** is the Spirit's lifelong work of making us holy. **Declared righteous to be made righteous; never made righteous to be justified.**

3. CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS CREDITED TO US

Alien righteousness: outside ourselves, belonging to Jesus. HC Q60: His satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness credited to me **"as if I had never sinned"** and had obeyed as perfectly as Christ. Jesus lived the obedience we owed and bore the judgment we deserved. **2 Cor. 5:21:** our guilt counted to Him; His righteousness counted to us. Justice is satisfied, and God declares us righteous. **Jer. 23:6: "The LORD is our righteousness."**

FAITH ALONE: RECEIVING CHRIST

Romans 3:28: "One is justified by faith apart from works of the law." HC Q61: faith itself earns nothing; it is the instrument that **receives Christ and His righteousness.** This was the great Reformation recovery. Our right standing rests on Christ's righteousness imputed to us, not holiness developing within us.

Spurgeon's locomotive: Grace is the engine; faith is the connecting chain (the coupling) that joins the carriage to its power. The engine does the pulling! **Christ saves; faith receives.** Do not spend your life inspecting the coupling and forgetting the locomotive. Do not put faith in your faith; put your faith in Jesus.

5. WORKS ARE THE FRUIT, NEVER THE PRICE

James 2: living faith bears fruit. **Justified by faith alone, but genuine faith is never alone.** The Spirit makes us holy because we already belong to Christ. Good works are the evidence of salvation, never its purchase price.

> **Application:** You snap at your spouse or children. Repent, confess, ask their forgiveness, fight the sin. But do not try to purchase God's favor with extra prayers or better performance. Return to Christ, whose blood paid for your sin, and ask His Spirit to make you more like Him.

6. ASSURANCE THAT SURVIVES EVERY SEASON

Is my faith strong enough? Was my conversion sincere? Why do I still sin? **Look to the Savior!** When illness or old age takes away your strength to serve, your justification has not decreased. Christ's righteousness is as perfect on your last day as on your first day of faith. **Romans 8:1: "No condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."**

Final appeal: What are you trusting in: baptism, church membership, Catechism knowledge, your good works? None can justify.

Come with empty hands. Repent and believe. **The Judge has spoken: RIGHTEOUS! JUSTIFIED! ACCEPTED IN CHRIST!** Rest in Him, and serve Him with gratitude.