

Job's two questions

Part 1

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[00:00:00] In short section, first of all, in chapter 3, beginning in verse 19, Romans chapter 3, verse 19.

Now we know that such things, sir, as the law says, it is best for them who are under the law, that every mask may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law, there shall be no flesh to justify in his sight. For by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now, the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophet, being the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all, and upon all them that believe. For there is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, [00:01:04] to declare his righteousness through the remission of sins of our past through the forbearance of God, to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. And the second passage in chapter 5 of the same epistle, Romans chapter 5, beginning at verse 1. Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulations worth of patience, and patience, experience, and experience, hope. And hope makes us not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. [00:02:03] For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet per a venture for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commended his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. Now we shall be thinking this evening about what I might call Job's two questions. Job is the name of one of the books of the Old Testament, which contains a very remarkable story, and we shall turn to this book in order to find these two questions. The first is in chapter 14, and in verse 14. Job chapter 14, verse 14.

And the first few words of the verse only. If a man die, shall he live again?

If a man die, shall he live again?

[00:03:03] And the second question, a particular form in which we shall read it, not asked by Job, but very close to a question which he did ask, chapter 25, verse 4.

Chapter 25, verse 4.

How then can man be justified with God?

How then can man be justified with God?

Now these two questions come to us from literally hundreds and hundreds of years ago.

It would be all just true to say these questions come to us from thousands of years ago. And yet they're very up-to-date questions indeed. And as we come to think about this first one, if a man die, shall he live again?

[00:04:01] I think I can illustrate this question by referencing the two persons, one of them whose name fills our newspapers, a name well known to everyone. The other one, merely a personal acquaintance of my own. But these two people will illustrate how important today are the questions which Job asked so long ago.

First of all, if a man die, shall he live again? Now the first name is Bertrand Russell, sometimes called Lord Russell. His name fills our newspapers because of his part in the campaign for nuclear disarmament and the way he encourages people to sit down in awful places and make a general use of themselves and get themselves into court and that kind of thing. Now in the book in which Bertrand Russell, who of course primarily was a mathematician, who became a philosopher, in one of his books he gives what he calls his philosophical autobiography. [00:05:06] Now this will be in most cases far too difficult for me and probably for you as well. But he does tell us why it was that he first began to take an interest in philosophy. And it was because he wanted to inquire whether reason would give any support to religion.

Whether he would find anything in the thoughts of the greatest thinkers that the world has known which would give him any authority to believe in God and religion. And he tells the sad story of how he didn't find what he was seeking. How the more he went into the deep questions which philosophers discuss, first of all he began to doubt the freedom of man's will, secondly he began to doubt the reality of a future life, and in the end he came to disbelieve in the existence of God. He realised, and this is the point of course for which I tell you this little bit of the story of Bertrand Russell, [00:06:04] he realised that the question, if a man dies, shall he live again, is absolutely vital to the reality of the Christian faith.

If we accept the Christian faith we are bound to face the question of a future life. Now the other one is also in some sense a typical, a topical story. We've all been very greatly shocked in the newspapers lately now with the account of this great aeroplane, a Boeing 707, in the continental jet which crashed just off the Idlewild aerodrome in New York. Now it's only a few months ago that I was flying in a Boeing 707, most people do, these days there's nothing very special about that, but it just happened that I got my most wonderful sight of Greenland's icy mountains from a height of 7 miles and flying about 8 miles a minute. And as we were in a situation which is absolutely typical of the day in which we live, [00:07:07] and it wonders, and it marvels, my friend and I sitting there looking down on Greenland's icy mountains and brilliant sunshine, the blue sea, the white mountains, and the gleaming icebergs breaking away and floating south from the shore, it happened that we at that very moment were talking about Job's question. Thousands of years old and yet vital and real and urgent and important in the year as it was then, just towards the end of the year 1961. Because my friend was explaining to me how it was that he could not be a Christian. And the principal reason for which he could not be a Christian was that he found it impossible to believe in any form of a future life.

Now I won't bore you with the particular kind of reasons that he had for not believing in a future life, and therefore of course he was quite right that not believing in a future life, [00:08:03] it was impossible for him to be a Christian. But I won't bore you with telling you why he didn't believe. But after he had explained this, and after a few seconds' silence, I said to him, I would like to ask you a very direct and simple question.

And that is, are you conscious of a kind of tension inside you?

There is a kind of upper level of your thought in which you have persuaded yourself that there are reasons for not believing in a future life.

And I want to ask if you're aware of a kind of tension between that idea and a deeper level, a deeper voice, a still, quiet voice that all the time tells you that there is a future life, and that in the end you've got to reckon with the fact that there is a future life. And he said quite simply, oh yes, I'm quite aware of that.

[00:09:04] There is. I don't think much about it nowadays. It doesn't trouble me because I just put it out of my mind. But there is, at a deeper level, that voice which is said to me, yes, there is a future life, but I just try to forget it.

Now this really brings me to the most important point. Some people might expect a teacher, when considering a subject like this, to bring some kind of a special proof, a kind of unanswerable proof, that there is such a thing as a future life, and convince your mind and lead you from point to point so that you might reasonably come to the conclusion that you can believe in a future life. Now I'm not going to do that.

No. The great point at which I wish to end this evening is that quiet voice deep down inside you, deep down in your heart, that might listen for years to the arguments of men [00:10:03] who have tried to persuade you that there is no future life, and that you won't have to meet God when this life is done, there is a little voice inside which the holy scriptures call presence, and that voice assures you that it is true that there is a future life. It is true that though a man die, yet he shall live again, and it is true that in that future life, every one of us shall have to answer to God. You know that it is true.

Now in saying what I have said, I don't want you to think that there is anything unreasonable about believing in a future life.

One of the great things that impresses me more strongly is this, that there is nothing at all in our Christian faith which is hostile to reason. Reason is a faculty that God has given us, and it is adequate in many cases to make our way about the ordinary affairs of life, [00:11:02] and it is right and just that we should understand that things which are true will fit in with it. There is nothing hostile to reason in the belief in a future life, but of course a great fact is concerning the future life, and concerning our responsibility to God, and all the other great things that belong to the spiritual realm of which the Holy Scriptures speak, our reason would never find them.

Our reason would never reach them. Man by searching cannot find God.

But when God is willing to reveal himself and to reveal his truth about this as about every other important question of our relation to God, then we find that in the truth that God reveals, though we

could never reach it by reason, there is nothing there that is hostile to our reason. In fact it's a very striking thing that 400 years before Christ, [00:12:02] I've mentioned a philosopher, one of the greatest thinkers who ever lived, Plato, 400 years before Christ he set down the reasons for which on the ground of logic alone he did believe in a future life and in what he called the immortality of the soul. And when once we've realized that it is upon the word of God that we rely to reveal the truth about the answer to the question, if a man die, shall he live again?

Well, once we understand that only God can reveal the truth about the answer to this question, then we find that there is, as a matter of fact, nothing at all which is difficult for us to believe because it is hostile to our reason. If we take the complete Christian form of the answer to the question, if a man die, shall he live again, to wit, the resurrection, then we shall rise again from the dead and have to be with God. [00:13:02] And the most complete form is the resurrection of the Christian, then the Christian at the word of the Lord shall rise from the dead and shall go to meet the Lord and to go to be with him in heaven. Then we only have to turn to one of the letters of the New Testament, the epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 15, to find how rationally the great apostle reasons about this question in the sense that once it has been revealed that this is so, then there's nothing at all that is hostile to our other experience. In fact, when he finds people willing to say, how are the dead raised and with what body do they come, he points them to that tiny seed, which there's absolutely no signs beforehand of the marvellous things that can happen to it. And it is dropped into the ground and it dies. And unless you've seen that thing happen before, you think it is done for. But we find that a plant springs up. [00:14:02] And in the language of that passage of scripture, when we see that plant, we see that God has given to that tiny seed a body as it has pleased him, to every seed his own body.

You see, the point is that you can take that tiny seed and think of all these processes of reason and proof that could be conceived. You could line them all up, from Plato and Aristotle in the ancient world, to Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein in the modern world, and none of them could tell you what can happen to that seed by a reasonable process. But there, the annual miracle, being performed a thousand times in the experience of all of us who are here in the room, it is put down into the ground and it dies. And God gives it a new body as it pleases him. And on that new body there is absolutely no promise in the seed that is put into the ground. And the great apostle says, if it is true that God gives in his own time and in his own way [00:15:02] a new body to that seed which is falling to the ground and dies, why should you think it difficult to believe that God can raise the dead and can raise the Christian in a new body and in a new life and suitable for the very life of heaven and for the home of God.

But let us be quite sure that in answer to this question, if a man die, shall he live again, Job's question in chapter 14, if a man die, shall he live again, we have the plain answer of the Holy Scripture. And I should be absolutely failing in my responsibility of presenting to you the truth about these things if I fail to show you and to quote to you exactly some of those things that the Holy Scriptures teach in answer to this question. The Lord Jesus Christ himself said, the time is coming when all that are in the graves [00:16:02] shall hear his voice and they shall come forth, some for the resurrection of life and some for the resurrection of judgment. Now these are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ and these are the answer that he gave and that it recorded in the Holy Scriptures to this tremendous question. If we die, are we done for?

No, if we die, we shall be raised again, some of us shall be raised again to the resurrection of life and some of us shall be raised again to the resurrection of judgment. One of the most solemn pages in the whole of the Scripture is the story of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some have thought, some have called

it a parable, but there is absolutely nothing to indicate that it was a parable. It was merely that the very Lord of life and death, the master of the grave, was telling a story, two biographies, [00:17:03] in a manner that no one else could tell because what are all human biographies tell the story of a man's birth and his life and his dreams and his death and that's the end of the story. The Lord Jesus Christ, when he told the story of the rich man and the poor man who were so poor that they had to feed upon the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, the Lord Jesus Christ didn't stop the story of death but he went on to the life that is beyond to show the great difference between these two men, not because one was rich and one was poor, but one had faith, the faith that saves, and one had ignored and forgotten God because the Lord Jesus Christ said, the rich man died and was buried and in hell, he lifted up his eyes being in torment. Do I enjoy repeating these words?

Not a bit of it, but there, as sure as anything is, [00:18:02] they're the words of the scripture and they're the words of the Lord Jesus and they cause to impinge upon us in our minds and our hearts and our consciences the reality of the fact that poor men die, poor women die, yet he or she shall live again to have to do with God.

We're asked to read the story of the other man who was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom and there he was carried to the form of delights. Some of these things, I repeat, are not pleasant hearing, but they're the words of the scripture and they're the warnings that the Saviour himself has given us so that we may realize how tremendously urgent and important is the answer to the question if a man die, shall he live again?

The Lord Jesus has answered that question and if once we realize that it is true that death is not the end of all, [00:19:01] that we shall be raised from the dead and we shall have to face the fact that every one of us shall give account to God of the deeds done in the body, then we shall never rest until we have the answer to the other question that Job asked and his friends asked and that I've read to you from the twenty-fifth chapter of his book, the question which says how then can man be justified with God?

If it is true, if it is certain that death doesn't end all, if God through the Saviour has told us that we shall be raised again, that we shall come to have to do with God, then the most urgent question that could possibly ask is this question how then can man be justified with God?

Now, the very reason why I read this passage from the Epistles of the Romans [00:20:02] is because it is the great letter which finds its place in the New Testament because it is in great detail and in great power it is the answer given in the New Testament to this question asked long before how then can man be justified with God?

The full answer to that question is given in that letter. Now, out of all that was written and even out of the two passages that I've read there are three great statements made as to how a man can be justified with God. You realise what it means, don't you? We all realise what it means to ask the question how can a man be justified with God? One of the ways in which it's put in our day by many preachers of the Gospel perhaps it's the golden sound that really brings home to us what it means how can a man be right with God?

[00:21:01] If I'm assured and if my heart and conscience tells me that it is certainly true that I must meet God on the other side of death I must give account to God of the deeds done in the body then nothing can exceed the importance of finding out how I can be right with God and not only how I can

be right with God but how I can know that I'm right with God and that's what the question means how then can man be justified with God?

Now the first great statement from the epistle to the Romans that answers that question is the statement that it is true of the Christian and of no one else it is only when you have quite definitely become a Christian it is only when you have quite definitely said Christ for me it is only when you have taken the steps of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that this becomes true that on the Christian [00:22:01] this letter says in answer to that question that he is justified freely by God's grace now that is a very wonderful statement because it tells us that away we are at the back of all things that it is in the heart of the God who made the worlds and the God who is my creator and your creator and the God who is going to be our judge away at the back of all things is the wonderful fact of his grace and his loving kindness toward us is it not the greatest possible news that God is disposed to be gracious toward us? is it not the greatest possible news that God, the God who rules over all things is a God whose heart is full of loving kindness and tender mercy to us who have so deeply sinned against him you know there are thousands of people in the East who believe that there are two Gods [00:23:02] there is a good God and an evil God there is a God of light and a God of dark and they are about balanced there is no triumph really in the evil they are about balanced with each other but you see the real truth of the matter is that the God who rules over all things and in whose power, in whose hand is absolute power over us and over all things that his heart is full of loving kindness and tender mercy toward us and it is because of that that the Lord Jesus Christ ever came to earth and died upon the cross to be our saviour and the first great news about this question how can a man be justified with God is that God desires above all things to be gracious toward us and to give us the blessing of his salvation and his forgiveness and the second great statement is that we are justified by the blood of Jesus [00:24:02] you see in that first statement justified freely by his grace that little word freely has a most particular meaning it doesn't only mean that you can have it for nothing but it means that there is no cause in the Christian himself or herself for which God should be gracious to him there is no reason in me or in you that God should be gracious to us there is only in me and in you black sinfulness and forgetfulness of God there's a reason there why God should punish us there is a reason there why God should bring us into judgment but there is no reason there why he should be gracious to us but in God himself in his great heart of love toward us there is a reason and that is that it is nature it is his desire it is his great love that he desires to do us good and since there is no reason in ourselves [00:25:03] why God should give us his blessing he has found a reason in the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ has died for us another acquaintance of mine told me a very remarkable story of one of the elements which led him to be a Christian he went to a mission which is held in the church to which he belonged it was a mission which was being held by the Dominican fathers and it was a mission for men and I don't think I've ever heard a more graphic story of how as they filed into the church each man was given a lighted taper and they went there and they were in their seated ranks in this great church and there was no light at all except the light of these dozens and hundreds of flickering tapers and the preacher first of all [00:26:02] told them about their sins and how they'd forgotten God and how because of their sins they would die and he told them how their lives were like the flickering flames of these tapers and at any minute they might be out and he told us how strong men were shielding the flame lest it should blow out as an emblem of how easily their life could depart and they would there be to God and the preacher told them about the fact that their sins would bring them into hell and he dangled them there he made them feel the very flames of that place of which the scripture speaks so solemnly and after he told them of these things all right and true, sad, solemn tremendous in their truth all true that we have sinned against God all true that the holy scripture speak about the fact that there is salvation at the end of the pathway of those who forget God [00:27:02] but then he began to make a mistake he

began to tell them how that by doing the works of the church they could lift themselves from the jaws of hell to the gates of heaven at the very moment the preacher was saying this his eyes lighted upon the great crucifix there and a voice seemed to say if it be true that by doing the works of the church I could raise myself from the jaws of hell to the gates of heaven why did the son of God die upon the cross and it was right wasn't it if we are to be justified it is the holy scripture say not by works of righteousness that we have done but by the blood of Jesus it is because Jesus the spotless son of God gave his life [00:28:02] in sacrifice upon the cross it is because he his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree there was none other good enough to pay the price of sin he only could unlock the gates of heaven and let us in and all this is wrapped up in these few words of holy scripture that say if we are to be justified with God it is by the blood of Jesus and the third great statement that the scripture in Romans the passage we read makes in answer to this question how then can a man be justified with God is this therefore it says I read it too therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and here is the crux of the matter if it be true and indeed it is [00:29:02] true that if a man die he shall live again if it be true and indeed it is true that every one of us shall give account of himself to God if it is true and indeed it is true that we can be justified freely by the grace of God and justified through the blood of Jesus in other words through that holy sacrifice of his upon the cross then the great crux of the matter is for you and me whether we are amongst the people whose faith is in the law of Jesus Christ now what does it mean to say that we have faith in the law of Jesus Christ what does it mean to say that the Christian is justified by faith we have heard that he is justified by grace we have read that he was justified by the blood of Jesus [00:30:02] what does it mean to say that the Christian is justified by faith you know it all seems to me that the best possible kind of example of what it means to say that the Christian is justified by faith is the example of what we do regarding the physician or the lawyer let's take the physician because the law of Jesus Christ speaks of himself in this manner when he says they that are whole need not a physician but they that are sick and in these words the law of Jesus Christ speaks to us who are sick with the dreadful sickness of our sins and we have got the symptoms of that disease we are blind we are helpless to please God we are without strength in his sight that when we are sick [00:31:02] with the sickness of our sins then we only need the touch of the great physician to put us right what do we do when it's a question of getting put right by the doctor for the ordinary aches and pains and diseases that afflict us in this mortal life you might very well hear two people discussing a certain general practitioner and you might find that one of them said well I believe in him I think he's a first class doctor and I think he's a particularly good at dealing with pneumonia but if a person gets that particular complaint that they've been discussing then the real test as to whether they have faith in that particular man the real test especially it was true before we all had to be registered with a particular man if a person really had that faith in a particular man his faith [00:32:02] would lead him to the action of going along and telling the man how sick he was and putting the case into his hands. Now that act is the act which is a picture of what the Bible calls faith it's no good for us to be able to say I believe in God it's no good for us even to be able to say I believe that God loves me and that Jesus is the saviour. That's the way that we can act in the act of a saving faith is to go to him the great physician the Lord Jesus Christ and confess to him how deeply we are sick with the sickness of our sins confess to him how deeply we have sinned against God that's what the Bible calls repentance and then when it goes on after repentance to speak about faith in the Lord Jesus Christ then that faith is the faith of those who put [00:33:02] the case into his hands remembering what he said him that cometh unto me I will no wise cast out in fact all the scriptures seem to ransack all the human situations in which good and blessing can come to us to give us pictures of what it means to have this saving faith the saving faith is one but sometimes the holy scriptures call it coming to him sometimes they call it receiving him sometimes they call it believing in him that it is all these things it is coming to him it is receiving him it is believing in him it is confessing him but what they really mean

is that we come to him each one individually for ourselves and we confess to him our sins and we ask him to receive us and to be our saviour and to be our lord we begin [00:34:02] our talk this evening with the first question that I read from Job the question which says if a man die shall he live again you know these questions that we have thought of been thinking of this evening they remind us of the fact that this life that we live this life in which we enjoy the right sunshine that shines upon us and it waxes to the noon day of life and it wanes again and this life that we live is like the day that rises and falls it soon passes by it soon passes from youth to manhood and from youth to womanhood and it soon declines like the setting sun and the moment comes when it is appointed unto men once to die this the judgment you know Job knew the answer to both these questions because he uttered some of the most [00:35:02] triumphant words that a man has ever uttered when in answer to these questions he said though after my skin worms destroy this body yet in my flesh shall I see God I know that my redeemer liveth and though after my skin worms destroy this body yet in my flesh I shall see God I wonder if all of us who are here are prepared for the answers to these two questions that if we die we shall live again we shall have to do with God and if we are ready by being justified through faith in the law of Jesus Christ and therefore we know that we have peace with God there is I believe a French play which deals with [00:36:02] an ocean scene a huge ocean going liner and somehow or other in the stages contrived the deck and the rail and the evening sun sparkling in the waters and there is the gentle heave and motion a delightful scene and here leaning on the rail and looking out are two young people honeymooners now I've been to a wedding today and these two young honeymooners are off none of us know where on their honeymoon now these two young people were honeymooners we aren't told what they were saying to each other that of course is a secret but it was bound to be something about their expectation of their future life together and there they are wrapped up in each other's company [00:37:02] in the lovely scene and the rise and fall of the swell and just as they do this there is a movement and they part from each other and there is revealed between them a life buoy and on the life belt the name of the ship the Titanic and there is a tremendous shock to the audience because everybody knows that whatever they thought about their life together that great ship on its maiden voyage struck a iceberg and heaved up to an angle of 45 degrees and slid down into the icy waters with hundreds and hundreds of people being lost and it's probable that they never enjoyed their life together because their life in this world ended and they have to meet God. Be assured that the brief day of your life will soon be ended and then there will never be two questions more important than these questions [00:38:02] that we've been considering tonight you'll never regret realizing at this moment that they are supreme in their importance for you both in this life and that which is to come if a man die, shall he live again? Indeed he shall the day is coming when all within the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they shall come forth, some to the resurrection of life and some to the resurrection of judgment. If you have for yourself realized the answer to the second question and you know what it is to be justified by faith in the law of Jesus Christ then you can be assured by the word of the living God himself you can be assured that your part will be in the resurrection of life and your life will be in that golden city into which only those can enter whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life and there they need no sun to shine for the glory [00:39:02] of God lights it and the Lamb is the lump thereof and the pure water of life clear of crystal flows ever when the soul is gone.