

I'm Justified. Now What?

Romans 5:1-2

Studies in Romans #18

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Last Sunday I said that we as a congregation are facing a lot of challenges. We have *financial* challenges with a huge deficit between our budget and our giving. We have the challenge of *stability*, as we take a step forward in growth, only to take two steps back with people moving away. We face the challenge of *leadership*, as we need experienced, godly men to serve as elders and deacons. We face the challenge of *burnout*, as the typical 20% of the people do 80% of the work is true even in a small church like ours. We face the most important challenge of all, which is *spiritual*. Are we going to take up the cross and follow Christ? Do we love the world more than the Word?

There is a lot of uncertainty; there is a lot of mess; there is a lot of instability in our life together as a congregation. This morning I am here to encourage you by saying there is one thing that remains among. Our church was founded on it, it will be our foundation whether the Lord gives us another 15 years together or a mere 15 months: the gospel of Jesus Christ! **Therefore, since we have been justified by faith** (v. 1). You and I may feel like we are in a valley spiritually this morning individually and as a congregation; but today we scale the peak and Jesus looks us in the eye and speaks into our ears, "You belong to me, I have taken all your mess and made it my own, I have given you all my perfection and made it yours, and now you are acceptable to God as a Heavenly Father." Do you

need to hear that message today? I do. As Martin Luther said: “in the whole Bible there is hardly another chapter which can equal this triumphant text.”¹

This week has been particularly tough on my faith as I contemplated all our challenges as a congregation; but I knew, come Sunday, I had a message from God for you. **Therefore**. Do you realize how important that word is? **Therefore** after all God has just said to us through Paul’s pen about our sin of idolatry and immorality, about our worthless works; **therefore** after all we’ve heard Jesus Christ has done to be the propitiation for our sins, that is, to be the sacrifice upon which God turned his face and poured out his wrath so I can experienced his loving face; **therefore** after all we have just learned about father Abraham and his faith that grabbed hold of Christ 2,000 years before he stepped foot on this earth—**therefore!**

Therefore what? **Since we have been justified by faith**. What kind of a verb is that? Is this a future tense that says you will be justified at some point in the future? Is this an uncertain verb that says you may be justified? Is this a verb that says you can be justified because you’re good, but then be unjustified because you’re bad? No, no, no! A thousand times, no! **We have been justified**. When I believe in Jesus, God the Righteous declares me the sinner once and for all time and eternity to be just, to be righteous, to be what I need to be in order to face God with joy and not fear. This is why the Westminster Larger Catechism, for example, says “justification is *an act* of God’s free grace unto sinners.” An act, not a process, not a potential; an act. And in that act “he pardoneth all [my] sins, accepteth and accounteth [me] righteous in his sight.” Why? “Not for any thing

¹ *Commentary on Romans*.

wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone” (WLC, Q&A 70).

Hallelujah! What a gospel!

Therefore since we have been justified by faith Paul now goes on to list of the benefits of this act of God in our lives. Justification is the root; now we get to enjoy the fruits. Our theology must become our biography. How are we going to be encouraged as a congregation today? How are we going to head into the future with confidence that God isn’t done with us yet? Theology. Now is not the time to change our strategy and hide from the deep truths, the difficult truths of the Word of God. Now is the time to rely on those truths, proclaim those truths, and live out those truths. Now is the time to set up our memorial stone like Samuel say “Ebenezer, till now the Lord has helped us,” and from now he will go on to help us in continual revival and reformation.

Since I’ve gone so long already, we’re going to focus in on just verses 1–2 this morning. Notice three benefits of justification.

I Have Peace (v. 1)

Because I am justified *I have peace*. When you look back in Romans and even to your own life, you realize you were once a recipient of God’s wrath (1:18). As Paul says to the Ephesians, you were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) and by nature a child of wrath (Eph. 2:3). But all that is gone now. Now you are at **peace with God**. How?

Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Remember how important 3:21–26 was. There Paul explained how Jesus Christ is our propitiation to turn away the wrath of God from us

(3:25). You were once in a major fight with God that you could not win. And he was going to throw you into hell. You think this life is harsh; hell is infinitely worse. But because of Jesus Christ God doesn't throw you into hell, he hugs you as a daughter, as a son. If you are here today and you are fighting with God, perhaps you don't think he exists, perhaps you don't know, perhaps you're just living your life as you want and trying to block your thoughts of his existence and what awaits you with a bottle. If that's you today I want to say to you that you are under God's curse and wrath. He must punish you and even worse, in eternity. He must or else he's not God. But you don't have to go to hell. God has sent his Son Jesus Christ to the world for sinners like you. It is **through...Jesus Christ** that you can be at peace with God right here and right now.

This is a peace I cannot even begin to describe to you. Paul calls it elsewhere "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). I want you all to have that so bad today. It's an objective state that you will live in but it also is a personal tranquility of conscience, a cognitive rest that you have laid down your arms, and so has God! Spiritual anxiety and a disturbed conscience are transformed. The old hymn says it best:

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot Thou hast taught me to say:
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come
Let this blest assurance control:
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And has shed His own blood for my soul.

I Have Access (v. 2)

Because I am justified *I have access*. Again, it is **through him**, that is, Jesus Christ, that **we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand**. What is he talking about? The **grace in which we stand** is our justification by faith in Jesus Christ. He simply calls us **grace**. How do I enter into it? **By faith**, by trusting in Jesus Christ alone. I was reading this week that today, in fact, at the service for the installation of the new presiding bishop over the American Episcopal Church, that an Islamic imam is going to pray this prayer: “Help us to understand what You have told us in Your Holy Quran.” Of all the days to do this! It’s All Saints Day today in the traditional church calendar, or for more hardcore Protestants, Reformation Sunday. On the day that commemorates the saints who have sealed their faith with their blood and on the day that commemorates the gospel’s proclamation once again to the world, a prayer is offered in a Christian service asking God to teach us the Quran.

But Paul says it’s **through him**, it’s through Jesus whose body was offered and whose blood was spilled that we **have...obtained access...into this grace**. The imagery here is the temple. How do I know? Because the word used here for **access** is only used elsewhere in Ephesians 2:18 and 3:12 in the context of the church being the new temple of God. And so it is through Jesus Christ himself, like the veil of the temple, that we enter into the very Holy of Holies itself with boldness and confidence (Heb. 4:16). Who enters? Priests? Pastors? Every single believer no matter who you are!

No let me say that Paul speaks here of the **grace** of justification, which I’ve already said is a once for all act of God that we receive through faith. But just like our peace with

God is both objective and subjective, so too with accessing God's grace there is both a once for all aspect and an ongoing aspect to this. We have accessed God's grace in justification once for all. That does not and cannot change. But we also access God's grace continually throughout our Christian life through prayer, through preaching, through the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.

I Have Joy (v. 2)

Because I am justified *I have joy*: **and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.** How can we not? Sinners are now saints. Rejoice! The dead are alive. Rejoice! Those under wrath are now at peace. Rejoice! How do we **rejoice? In hope.** Remember what I've before. Hope in Scripture is not a wish. It is a confident expectation for the future based on what God has done in the past. God raised Christ, therefore I hope to be raised. It's certain. And now that I am justified, I **rejoice in hope** for what? **The glory of God,** meaning, that final and ultimate experience of eternal life. Paul says in chapter 8 that "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18) and that "those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30).

Peace, access, joy. This is what you have in Jesus Christ, brothers and sisters. This is what we have together as a church family. Are you discouraged today? Are you worried about what the future holds? Do you feel like everything is uncertain and tentative today? But the gospel isn't! But Jesus Christ isn't! And in him we stand confident today that he who began a good work among us will bring it to completion to his own glory. Amen.