

Reading: Romans 3:21-4:8

Theme: Since we have been justified through faith.

I guess most of us have either read the book Treasure Island or seen a film on it – it is about pirates and buried treasure! Imagine we discovered an old sea chest buried and as we raised the lid, we find unbelievable riches and treasures. As we took out each layer, there were more and more fabulous riches. How would we feel? Excited, amazed, astonished and more besides? I feel a bit like that as I approach this chapter, as I've read, studied, thought and prayed about it, I see amazing riches from God's word and I feel it is a privilege to handle and present these glorious truths. It is a responsibility, as I know these riches are so precious and I want them to be precious to you too. Hopefully I will not cast any shadow over their brightness as I open this passage up, but allow the truth of God's word to sparkle and dazzle you also.

Last week we looked at the start of chapter 5 and we saw that we reached a **turning point** - "Therefore" indicated this; then we **glanced backwards** at what had been written before and then we **looked ahead** to see the glorious matters of the assurance and certainty of our salvation.

What Paul wrote of was dependent on the next phrase being true in the experience and lives of his first readers. It was then, it still is dependent on being true of us in our lives. Paul wrote "*Therefore being justified by faith*" (AV), "*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith*" (NIV). Please realise that every truth, every comfort, every encouragement Paul goes on to write of are all dependent upon us being justified by faith. Without this there is no peace with God, no access into His grace, no hope of the glory of God, no poured out love of God in our hearts, we are not in Christ, but still in Adam.

So, early in this sermon, the word of God challenges us, confronts us as individuals with the important question we need to ask ourselves

“*Am I justified by faith?*” Are we able to say that personally? Do we know we are justified by faith alone? Indeed, do we know what that means? If we have no idea of what this is, are confused here or are woolly headed, then we can miss out on the fullest blessings of God that gush out from this glorious truth. All I want to do in this sermon is to look at something of what it means to be justified by faith and to lay before us all something of this great and glorious work of God to encourage us - first and foremost to believe on the Lord Jesus - and then to go on in that faith. It has been a big area to prepare and I am not going to deal with every aspect and ramification of being justified by faith. There are excellent books available on this e.g. Philip Eveson – “Great Exchange: Justification by Faith Alone” (Day One). “Justification” by James Buchanan (BOT) and FIEC has a Primer book on Justification called “A Place to Stand” (Good Book Company). See 4 points open up this phrase:

1. A Law Court.

The word “*justified*” used here by Paul, is a legal term, often classed as a forensic term - as it relates to the law courts. Picture someone up in court, charged with robbery, swindling or even bankruptcy as a result of such. The evidence has been heard. The arguments have been presented. The verdict is reached after the judge’s summing up and directions given to the jury. What is the verdict? Guilty – sentence is given. Cheers ring out and a campaign is started for an appeal for this miscarriage of justice! Innocent - howls of disbelief; an inner smile of satisfaction by the defendant as they knew they were innocent; or even that they knew they were guilty, but they have escaped justice! If it is the innocent verdict, the judge would declare the person not guilty and innocent of those charges.

Yet that picture is not correct concerning justification; for justification is not a case of merely being declared innocent or even “not guilty”; nor is it ever a wrong verdict - saying one thing, but really being the other. We cannot leave our illustration there in in a court of law, but we need to go to:

2. The Law Court of Heaven.

Picture God as the Judge, He is sat on His throne. Before Him stands a mere mortal, let's make it personal - picture you or me standing there. There is no need for a jury, no need for a prosecution lawyer, no need even for a defence lawyer. The evidence against that person is known and known intimate detail - not only about their public actions and words, but also their private actions, motives and words; their very thoughts and imaginations are known and known to the Judge on the throne. There they are, standing before God. The defendant realises they are unable to excuse or defend themselves and know they are guilty, know they have broken God's law, robbed God and stand there bankrupt and guilty with offence upon offence against this God.

All those around know the person's guilt, that they deserve condemnation, can do nothing and are unable to pay. Yet, incredibly the Judge does not condemn them, but justifies them. Justification is the opposite of condemnation. In 4:5 we learn God justifies the wicked, the ungodly! He is not justifying those who do their best, feel rotten or mourn over their sin and try to do better. God, this surprising God, justifies the ungodly, the wicked. Not the nice religious people who have done their best or reformed their lives, but it is the wicked, ungodly, the ones who rightly deserve condemnation.

Maybe you are thinking that such an action is unfair, unbelievable and incredible, but let me refocus your view on this court - it is not final day of Judgement, but it is the appeal court of heaven and here the throne is the throne of grace. The ones present there have not gone to receive justice, but have gone to cry out for grace and mercy. Their appearance in this law court of heaven is a glorious part of their receiving God's grace and mercy.

If we appear in this appeal court of heaven it means that what is written in chapters 1-3 about us all being sinners has been applied personally to our understanding by the Holy Spirit to a greater or lesser extent. We realise we cannot earn our salvation, cannot possibly do enough to get right with God, but even as our situation seems hopeless and helpless, we realise there is a way, only one way for us to be accepted by God. Paul enlarges on this in chapter 4 - Abraham was not declared righteous on the basis of what he did, felt or achieved; otherwise that was wages; but he believed God and that was counted, credited to him as righteousness (4:3). We are to realise that amazingly shocking things go on in this appeal court of heaven, but see it is:

3. Perfectly Legal.

All who go to this appeal court are sinners and realise it. They know they are those who have offended God and broken His holy law. They know they are guilty, helpless and deserve His condemnation, but they leave the appeal court “justified” - just-if-I’d never sinned, just-if-I’d always had the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Has there been a miscarriage of justice, or a blind eye been turned, or a mistake been made? No - that is not the case, as incredibly, God lets us go from that court legally justified, with all His holiness, His justice, His integrity remaining intact as we read in **3:26**.

God cannot excuse, overlook our sin or say we are something when we are not. It is not some sort of transformation magic or jiggery-pokery, but a legal transaction takes place in that court. Of all beings, God **knows we are guilty**, deserve His condemnation and punishment. Yet we are there because we have accepted the divine invitation to put our faith in, our trust in the Lord Jesus as our sin bearer. As God the Holy Spirit draws us and we come to faith, we are given the gift of faith - there is no merit in our faith feeling per se, it is not working something up from within ourselves. Picture, as part of our being saved, becoming Christians, that we are here in this

appeal court, God knowing our debt, our guilt and He declares that He is acquitting us!

Yet that debt and guilt cannot just be swept aside, it has to be paid for and One stands there who has paid our debt, taken our guilt and our punishment in our place. All that sin and guilt of ours was reckoned to Him on the cross. All our debts were laid to His account to pay and He paid it all in full on our behalf. We read in 3:26 this is for *“those who have faith in Jesus”*. We can't simply say *“Sorry”* to God and expect all to be fine. We have to go to God in the Lord Jesus - the only way to God and the only Saviour He has provided.

It isn't a case of God saying *“Well Jesus suffered and I will accept you because He died.”* That is wrong, verging on the blasphemous. It was far more than that. Jesus died as an atoning sacrifice, a propitiation (3:25 NIV & AV). God was angry with us and our sin. Our sins' guilt deserved hell. Jesus died in our place to turn our just punishment of the anger and wrath of God away from us and onto Himself. Never downplay this, never lose sight of it. The English word *“propitiation”* was created by William Tyndale and carries that idea - *see the NIV footnote - which shows that.*

The Lord Jesus took our sin and its punishment. Some leave it there and say that is what justification is - we are innocent, not guilty. Thankfully, mercifully, God doesn't leave it at that - for there's more, gloriously more! for He then legally credits, reckons, imputes, gives to us forever all the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not bare nakedly innocent, but now we are clothed, dressed, adorned in Jesus' perfect righteousness - forever credited to our life account as ours. In 4:7-8 Paul quotes David's words in Psalm 32 - the man who is forgiven. Divine forgiveness goes further - God credits righteousness apart from works - as v6 says this (from Psalm 32?).

In our justification we not only have our sin and guilt removed and therefore are innocent, not guilty, but we are credited, given the righteousness, the perfection, the holiness of the Lord Jesus. Yet justification is more than that too! For in the divine law court, this fact about us, as it occurs in us and is legally declared about us, also **is recorded about us** by God. From that moment on we are not only made, but declared righteous and forever viewed as righteous by God. Justification includes the legal declaration by God, the working of God making us righteous in His sight **solely** on the basis of all Jesus Christ accomplished on our behalf in His life, death and resurrection.

I was tempted to quote various Confessions of Faith to see their rich use of words and truths. I pray that we would recognise that it not only legally and justly occurs **to us**, but is legally declared **about us**.

This actual and legal act of God, does not change us per se, **but it changes our state and standing with and before God**. No longer are we under His condemnation, no longer His enemies - for justification brings reconciliation and the first fruit Paul mentions here is that we have peace with God - but that's for next time.

Because of our being justified, at peace with God, then all else occurs, cascades from it - new life, adoption, sanctification (*we begin to live and work out the reality of our justified standing in holy living*) and we become more Christ-like. Realise our justification is perfectly legal and forever stands in the law court of heaven. Because of that we see it is:

4. Final.

Some have written and spoken of being “justified again”, of an ongoing process of being justified or re-justified. This is not the case. Justification is a **once and for declaration and action in the court of heaven**. We can never be re-justified.

Paul quoted David's words in 4:7 & 8 - which David is thought to have written after his adultery with Bathsheba and he had been restored. Even while David was unrepentant, for possibly 2 years, he **was not** unjustified, nor was he "lost". Yes, he was backslidden, was in sin, but he was still owned by God as justified. That does not give us an excuse to play fast and loose with sin - thinking that we are ok. In Psalm 32 David showed some of the agony he went through in his innermost being while unrepentant. David needed to repent and have a restoration of relationship with God. Justification brings us to peace with God and therefore into a relationship with Him. Confession as a believer does not bring us justification again, but a return, a restoration to the ongoing father and child relationship that a justified believer is able to have, know, delight in, enjoy and develop.

Justification is an eternal and final work. It cannot be redone, improved or diminished. Take a look at the court record - "*Justified*". The tense of the verb means once and for ever justified. If that was not the case, how could any of us have any assurance in our hope of salvation? We'd always be wondering "*Am I justified? Does God still view me favourably and accept me because of Jesus?*" We are to realise our debt of sin has been totally paid for by the Lord Jesus and God is not so unjust as to demand it is paid again. A lot of 18th and 19th-century hymns declare this truth wonderfully, forcefully; yes, modern worship songs will declare it too, but many modern worship songs can easily focus on feelings, their tunes and do not connect us with the truths of God word about our salvation - some do and are brilliant.

Thankfully the Lord would encourage us to have, to know the assurance and certainty of salvation, for it is an eternal and secure justification. Our God and our Saviour are so kind and gentle with us. This means it is not tarnished or adversely affected by our feelings - we may feel low, miserable, weak and worthless - yet we remain justified! Thankfully it's out of reach of our deserving,

feelings or failures. We are no more or less justified than at the moment we first trust the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour.

That is why the question we need to ask ourselves, which I asked at the start is so important - *“Am I justified by faith?”* Do we realise, recognise what God has done? We are to note it is *“being justified”*, *“since we have been justified”* - it is a passive matter, done to us by God and we can in no way justify or un-justify ourselves before God. Remember there are many glorious consequences from our justification by faith - peace with God, access by faith into the grace wherein we stand, exultation, hope... so, we could go on. But note 8:1 *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”*. As Charles Wesley wrote in His great hymn *“And can it be...” “No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in Him, is mine! Alive in Him, my living head, and clothed in righteousness divine, bold I approach the eternal throne, and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.”*

If we are able to say that, because we, by faith, have the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, then what a hope to go into our lives with. I pray we would all know this sure hope is ours. If you do not, then speak to me afterwards and I'll speak of the way to be justified by faith alone in the Lord Jesus.