

# ***“The Big Words of the Bible: Justification”***

## ***Romans 3.20-28***

Lenten Midweek 5, 2006

The Word of God which serves as the basis of our sermon meditation this evening was written down for our faith and life in the Epistle to the Romans, the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter, verses 20-28.

Thus far in our Lenten meditations we have looked at 4 of the Big Words of the Bible. We began with the word “repentance” and then examined in turn the words “redemption,” “imputation,” and “reconciliation.” These last 3 words we learned were financial terms used by the Spirit to convey the truth and nature of our salvation in language that people of any culture and any era could comprehend.

Tonight is no different for this evening’s Big Word of the Bible is a judicial term, language that is used in the court of law and legal code. This Big Word was a word that was at the heart of the Reformation and Luther’s contentions with Rome. Just how is a man declared righteous before God? We enter the realm of Divine justice and the court of heaven itself as we ponder this next Big Word of the Bible: Justification.

According to our Scripture reading from Romans, justification of the sinner, the transgressor of the Law, cannot occur by the keeping of the Law. The Law, we learn cannot justify us in the sight of the Holy Judge of Heaven and earth. All the Law can do is accuse us of our wrongdoing and point the finger at us saying, “Guilty! Guilty! Guilty!” For though, like the rich young ruler in our Gospel reading for tonight, we think we have done well and kept the commandments, the verdict of the Law announces that we have not.

The Law announces that we are like the uneven side on a printed piece of paper. We are not upright. We are not straight up and down, perfect and blameless in God’s sight. The judgment for this verdict is nothing short of eternal punishment and imprisonment in Hell. You can see why we need justification before God by God for as sinners we cannot extricate ourselves from the sentence on our sin. We cannot secure the pronouncement of “not guilty” simply because all of the evidence is against us.

As the charges are read off, as our lives are evaluated against the holy will of God, we are found guilty of failing to uphold the whole will and Law of God. We know what that will of God is. We know what the commandments are just as the rich young ruler. Yet, like him we will protest and wish to enter the plea of “not guilty” or “no contest”. But this is not possible in the courtroom of God. No plea bargaining and deals can be made with the Holy One of Israel for His requirements are simple and plain. We are to be holy and perfect just as He is.

This is why our Lord responds as He does in our Gospel reading. He knew the man had not kept the commandments but in His love want the man to realize this about himself, repent and believe on Him for his justification before God. He wanted the man to see that none of his works, not even good ones, avail before the Judgment Throne for man’s salvation. This is also why the disciples ask the question who then can be saved? If not by works and the keeping of the Law, then how?

What about you and me? Are we not tempted to think we have kept some of the commandments? None of us, I imagine, would have the audacity to say we have kept them all. Most of us, however, would try to impress on God that we have at least tried to keep them all and that ought to count for something. But is this line of thinking consistent with the Scriptures? Does God make allowance for good intentions and for effort? Does God give extra credit and round up our scores for us out of a sense of kindness and compassion?

Let’s see what the Bible says. “Therefore by the deeds of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight.” “but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.” “But, that’s not fair!” we protest. “It’s too much to ask,” we plead. But the Law does not yield an inch on this. “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” it announces to us. We are guilty of failing to be holy as the Law of God demands, as the Holy Judge of Heaven and earth requires.

Since we are transgressors of the Law we are also unable to secure our justification before God. We cannot make ourselves

upright and acceptable in His sight. As a result we stand to receive the Law’s judgment on the sinner. We stand before the Judge to hear the sentence of eternal death pronounced, an eternal separation from God in Hell. Such is the sentence of the Law on us because we are guilty and lack the holiness and perfection required. The gavel is raised by the Judge and is ready to fall securing our punishment and fate.

But it does not fall and declare that sentence on us because One comes to our defense. Christ Jesus, our heavenly Advocate, on account of His sufferings and death on Calvary’s cross, has brought to us a different verdict. He has given us justification before the Judgment Throne of Heaven. On account of His vicarious sufferings and death, because of His atoning sacrifice on the altar of Calvary, we, through faith in Him, have received the verdict “not guilty.”

But how can that be? How can a righteous and holy God possibly declare the unrighteous and ungodly sinner justified and acceptable in His sight, no longer sentenced to an eternity of death and torment? Didn’t you just get done telling us that our “goose was cooked” as it were? How were we justified in God’s sight though we were, pardon the phrase, guilty as sin?

St. Paul announces in our sermon reading for tonight that we are “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God sent forth as a propitiation by His blood...we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the Law.” The Synodical Explanation to Luther’s Small Catechism answers these questions stating “God declares sinners righteous for Christ’s sake; that is, our sins have been imputed or charged to Christ, the Savior, and Christ’s righteousness has been imputed or credited to us.”

What was impossible for us to obtain and achieve, we learn is possible with God on account of all that Jesus accomplished for us by His atoning life, sufferings, and death. Solely because of His perfect keeping of the Law, solely on account of His righteousness and holiness, solely on account of Jesus’ redeeming work are we able, by God’s grace, to hear the verdict of justification unto life eternal pronounced from the Judgment Seat of God in Heaven.

For justification simply means that on account of Christ's propitiating work we are pronounced free of all sins and are accepted as children and heirs of eternal life. It means we, though guilty in sin, by grace through faith are declared "not guilty" and are freed from the sentence of death and damnation solely on the basis of Christ's suffering of our sentence in our stead on the cross. It means that the sentence we deserved is not passed on us for Jesus assumed it and by His atoning death we are freed.

This verdict of justification by grace is possible because God's Son was declared guilty in our place. The Innocent and Just One of Heaven, He who committed no sin, was made Sin for us. He stepped in for us before the Judgment Throne and suffered the penalty we were to receive. As Isaiah the prophet announced and as was proclaimed in our sermon hymn for tonight. "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Since our iniquity was laid on Him, so also was its sentence. Through faith in Jesus Christ, all our sins, all our failures to be perfect and holy, all our transgressions have been put away from us as far as the East is from the West. Through faith in Jesus our sins are forgiven us and where there is no sin, there is no sentence of death and damnation. We, through faith, are now holy and perfect in God's eyes, since we have justification by grace in Christ our Lord.

How is a man saved? How are we justified in the sight of the Holy God? With men, we learn, this is impossible but with God it is possible, and, in fact, has been done for all who believe. This is our greatest comfort and assurance throughout our lives of faith. For when confronted by sin and guilt, we only need to look to the word of peace and pardon proclaimed in the Bible and know that by God's grace through faith in Jesus we have been justified, our guilt has been taken away and our sins paid for completely by our Lord and we now have entrance unto eternal life. We never have

to wonder if enough has been done, if we will ever get into Heaven, for the teaching of justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake lets us know without a doubt Jesus has done all for our salvation, for our forgiveness, for our entrance unto eternal glory.

As those who have been justified by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, our sins are no more, judgment for sin has been served by Christ, we are upright, holy, and acceptable in God's eyes, and we are assured of the resurrection to eternal life even as Christ was raised and lives to all eternity. The gavel fell when Jesus bowed His head in death. The echo resounded as the stone was rolled across the tomb. Our justification was proclaimed when Jesus rose from the dead.

Our sins have been paid for. The sentence has been served. We through faith in Christ have received the justification that leads to life everlasting for we have been "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God sent forth as a propitiation by His blood." So we learn from this Big Word of the Bible tonight, so we learn from the Spirit who has taught us about justification. Amen.

**+Soli Deo Gloria+**