

GOD'S JUSTIFYING SERVANT

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“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many: for he shall bear their iniquities.” (Isaiah 53:11)

The fall of the year always reminds us of harvest time, when we sing together “Come ye thankful people come, Raise the song of harvest home.” And we pray together, “Lord of harvest, grant that we, wholesome grain and pure may be.” It is during October that all Protestants worth their salt remember the great harvest the Lord brought to us out of the Reformation. The blood of the martyrs was truly the seedbed of the Church. As we gather together we remember those who loved God’s truth more than they loved their own lives. To die for truth is grand, but to die for God’s truth is glory.

The subject we have for meditation is one of those truths. It is what Abraham Booth called “The capital article of the faith once delivered to the saints.” This doctrine is the “hinge and pillar of Christianity,” said Thomas Watson. It is found in verse 11 of Isaiah 53, “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many: for he shall bear their iniquities.”

This is the doctrine that not only convinced the heart of Martin Luther, but changed the course of sacred history. Our catechism states, “Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us and received by faith alone.” The old Puritan Henry Smith put it this way, “God hideth our unrighteousness with Christ’s righteousness. He covereth our disobedience with His obedience. He shadoweth our death with his death, so that the wrath of God cannot find us.” “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect?” This is a question answered by the blood of the Lamb of God and confirmed, in blood, by thousands of little lambs over 400 years ago. Beloved, if the wrath of God is turned away from me, then I want to know about it. There is no more important question than the one posed by Job, “How can a man be just before God?” especially since there is “none righteous, no not one.” It is important because it is asked of every person who ever lived. A man’s eternal destiny hinges on the answer. It is a very difficult question because man is all sin and God is all righteousness. It is a question men incorrectly answer every day because they have insufficient views of their own guilt and of God’s unwavering standard of justice on the guilty. He will not acquit them. It is a supremely important question because God alone can answer it and Christ alone is the answer.

Yet if you were to ask the average church goer, “What is justification?” you might get a hundred different answers. Also many of God’s people are too familiar with the meaning of the word justification but little influenced by the impact of its truth. They have the answer memorized, but haven’t settled it in their hearts and in their lives.

God takes a man, utterly devoid of anything good, whose very righteousnesses are as filthy rags, whose every intention is evil, every desire iniquitous, every act unholy and unworthy. This man is not seeking after God, does not fear God, sees no beauty in Christ that he should desire him. This sinner is blind and impotent to all spiritual good. He is hell-born, hell-bred, and hell-bent. He stands guilty and condemned before God and his law. And these are the objects of God's righteousness freely bestowed. To these ungodly people, God reckons to their account the perfections of Christ's life, and the blood of Christ's death. His blood washes away all their sin, and his righteousness gives them a legal title to heaven and glory. Man's works and will have nothing to do with it whatsoever. This transaction is between God and His only-begotten Son, not only on the sinner's behalf but in the sinner's place.

The Roman Catholic Church condemns this doctrine by cursing all who believe it and that is why a freely bestowed justification became the principal truth to come out of the Reformation. Justification by faith alone, plus nothing. This is my glorious subject, and will be taken in three ways:

1. The Character of Justification: Its Essence
2. The Condition of Justification: Its Essentials
3. The Consolation of Justification: Its Effects.

1. The Character of Justification: Its Essence

The Bible tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ was God's agent in creation. "All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made." And God was satisfied with the work of his Son. God "saw everything that he had made and behold it was very good." And we can see in our text that God was also pleased with his Son's work in redemption. "He shall see the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied." For the redemption of sinners there is only one place God looks—the mercy seat. It is from this mercy seat that God is able to be "just and the justifier of them that believe." Jesus Christ is the source of all our righteousness; there is none apart from him. Because God has seen the travail of Christ's soul and is satisfied, because of that knowledge (approval), his righteous Servant shall justify many. As man Christ suffered; as God Christ satisfied. And free-grace salvation is the result. Apart from God in Christ, there is only condemnation. God will not acquit the guilty, and we need only look at Calvary to confirm it.

The first thing I want you to see about this justification is that it is gratuitous, or freely given. Paul, in the 3rd chapter of Romans, after establishing the fact that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," in the very next breath from heaven, without a word about man's work or man's will, God says, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Martin Luther had been brought up as a Roman Catholic and had been raised to believe that he had to depend on the Church and his own works for his justification before God. Therefore, he was never assured that he was saved, because he always came short. But one day the Holy Spirit opened up his darkened heart to realize that his justification before God was

wholly dependent on God's free grace in Christ Jesus alone. Salvation was the gift of God's grace.

This word 'freely' is a wonderful word. We can see its meaning clearly in the translation of this same word in John 15:25. Here the Savior is confronting his disciples on the night before he was to die. He is telling them that they will be hated like he was hated, and the reason is found in verses 23 & 24, "He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father." Then we find our word in the next verse. "But this cometh to pass that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, they hated me without a cause." Those three words are formed into one word in Romans 3:24, freely, "Without a cause"; there was no reason in Christ why these people should hate him. They hated him without a cause. He gave them nothing to excite their hatred of him. All he thought and did was good.

So here we have the same word in Romans 3:24, "Being justified freely (without a cause)." There was nothing in us to excite God to justify us. There was no reason in us why he should be so gracious to us. All we thought and did was wrong. God did it freely; he did it without a cause in us. "Grace, 'tis a charming sound, harmonious to the ear." God's free gift wasn't even given to neutrals, but to those who positively deserved his wrath.

Beloved friends, justification is free because it is the Divine prerogative of God's grace. "It is God that justifieth." In justification grace reigns alone, high above the faltering work and vacillating will of men. It comes from the perfect heart of God to perfectly ungodly sinners. Someone said, "Justification is a mercy spun out of the bowels of Free Grace."

It is not only free but it is full. Complete. Please notice the two prominent words in our text: "My *righteous* servant shall *justify* many." The word righteous and the word justify are the same word in the Hebrew and in the Greek. Just as the words faith and believe are the same. Faith is the noun, the substance of things hoped for, and believe the verb, the evidence of things not seen. Faith is the gift and belief is the reception of the gift and both are given by God. See Ephesians 2: 8-9.

So righteousness and justification are the same. Righteousness is the noun; it is the substance of God; and justification is the verb, the action word; it is how God imputes his righteousness; but they are one in the same essence. Do you see what that means here? God's righteous servant shall justify many. The very righteousness of the Servant is given to the sinful many. What Christ is essentially, is given sinners emphatically!

"But of God are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption." Here is the supreme character of justification. It is the righteousness of God himself, given by God himself and declared by God himself to be the sinner's, in a free act of sovereign grace. Every believer is freely and fully justified before God.

The old Puritan Thomas Watson said, "Mary Magdalene was as much justified as Mary the mother of Jesus, for they both had God's righteousness." Friend, if you only have a mustard

seed's worth of faith (from God) you are as righteous as the Son of God. "For God hath made Christ to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we (who knew no righteousness) might be made the righteousness of God in Him." Christ was treated as if he were a sinner, and we are treated as if we were the Savior.

Not only is it free and full, but our justification is forever. Can a member of Christ's righteous body be broken off? Can Christ be the perfect head without a perfect body? "Is Christ divided?" Who can separate us? "I am the Lord, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."

2. The Condition of Justification: Its Essentials

First of all it is not of works. This is the negative side of God's free grace. The conclusion Paul comes to about our gratuitous justification is that it is not of works. Romans 3:28, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Cf. Romans 4:4-8; also Titus 3:5-7.

The Roman Catholic quotes the Apostle James who says, "Ye see then how that by works is a man justified and not by faith only." There seems to be a discrepancy here. On the one hand, we are told that we are justified *without* works, and on the other, we are justified *by* works. But of course there are no contradictions in God's Word. The difference is only a matter of emphasis. Paul was opposing the legalists who taught justification by the law; so he stated, "We are not under the law," while James was opposing the Antinomians whose profession of faith was united to a life of blatant worldliness and ungodliness; so he states, "Faith without works is dead." Paul was speaking about our justification before God, while James was speaking of our justification before men.

The folks James was writing to were making a bold profession of faith, while at the same time indulging in the things of the world just like the ungodly around them. They seemed to be religious but didn't bridle their tongues; they gave the rich the prominent seats. They had bitterness and envy in their hearts; they had desires that were earthly and devilish. Many were friends of the world and therefore enemies of God. They lived in pleasure on the earth with no view of the purity of heaven. And the people around them were laughing at their profession of faith. So James states "be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

Dear ones, the Spirit of God puts a difference between the desires, habits, and activities of those addicted to the world's system and those he has awakened to the purity of Christ's righteousness. We had better be careful that we don't call our liberty in the gospel a license to be worldly and therefore be called by the Holy Spirit, "adulterers and adulteresses." I will not name world activities but I am prepared to warn God's people and myself that we must avoid what the world loves and despise what God hates. We are to "prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good." We are to "abstain from all appearance of evil." We are to "make no provision for the flesh nor give place to the devil." Christian liberty is one of the dearest treasures in God's vault. "All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient" (profitable). And you, before God, must

have the liberty to decide what is expedient. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us and not the work of the Church over us. "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." We must not destroy the wonderful Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of the believer.

But at the same time I will not want to make shipwreck of my life by professing boldly and then indulging in the "lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, and the pride of life." This pulpit and these pews must be the most unworldly in the world. "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead being alone." We must not make ourselves liable to the wrongful judgments by the world of God's people. This is why James states that "we must walk circumspectly." He is saying that others will only know if you are justified before God if they can "see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

But back to the original contention of Paul. We are justified before God without the deeds of the law. Good works are the result of our free justification by grace, not the cause of it. But they will always be the result, or we deny the power of God in sanctification. So our justification is not of works. And it is all of Christ. This is the heart of our truth today. "He shall justify many for he shall bear their iniquities." Iniquities cry out for condemnation. But Paul asks, "Who shall condemn? . . . It is Christ that died." "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." We often think of God's mercy here, and rightly so. But the Holy Spirit states that in making propitiation or atonement, God declares his righteousness. Here the sinner's pardon is built on the very attribute that is so dreadful to the unbelieving, the intractable justice of God. The attribute that seems to bar the door to God's forgiveness is actually the very threshold over which we receive God's mercy. God's justice is satisfied in Christ, so now He can be merciful. God's justice has become the believer's friend because God has judged Christ in the sinner's place. The two essentials in our justification are pardon and righteousness; both of them are gotten through the merits of Christ. The one, pardon, comes through his bearing our iniquities; and the other, righteousness, comes through the imputation of the righteousness of God, laid to our account because of Christ's perfect obedience to the law that we broke. Here we have a wonderful display of divine justice and boundless grace, all in order to make sinners right with God.

- Of divine justice if we consider the ground of it: the blood shedding and death of Christ.
- Of boundless grace, if we consider the state of those justified, which is so wonderfully phrased by Solomon in his song to his bride, "Thou art all fair my love." Or Isaiah who says, "Thy people also shall be all righteous."

I am certain that there is no one here who would base their acceptance with God on their own righteousness. But many times we do that very thing by condemning ourselves when we do wrong. Now our sins must be condemned; please don't get me wrong. But by condemning ourselves when God doesn't, we are in fact asserting that if we had done what is right, we would be accepted with God. Condemning ourselves is very close to anti-Christ. Let's remember that Christ Jesus is not only our justification but is also our condemnation.

There are also many among God's people who base their acceptance with God on the strength of their faith or the degree of their repentance. They make faith and repentance a work. So they are up and down all the time. But we need a standard that doesn't change, and that standard is Christ. The Savior bore our sin, in order to bear it away, out of God's sight, thereby expiating or putting away our guilt (as one old boy said "passing it by not even taking notice of it"); and we in turn receive his righteousness imputed or declared to be ours by faith, simply because God declared it and Christ earned it.

Justification is not to say that a believer is not a sinner, or doesn't deserve to be held accountable for that sin. It just means that all that God hated in us was washed away and covered by incorruptible blood and all that God loves in us (Christ) has been declared to be ours. When we are justified we are acquitted at God's bar of justice from every accusation, be it the Devil, our friends, or ourselves. And we are entitled to all the blessings of Christ's obedience and suffering. We are "Complete in Him."

Remission of sin and pardon takes away our liableness to eternal death and Christ's righteousness gives us a right and a title to eternal life.

You see beloved, God was not only pleased in bruising his Son, but when he saw the travail of his soul he said "this is my well-beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." In whom I am well atoned, well pacified, well satisfied and glorified. God says, "I look no further than Christ." And we shouldn't look any further as well. Faith rests on God's estimate of Christ. "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

The final condition is Faith. "We are justified by faith." Paul preaching in Acts 13 states, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." And even this condition is met by Christ. Philippians 1:29, "It is given on the behalf of Christ to believe."

3. *The Consolation of Justification: Its Effects*

Finally, in justification we have peace with God. Cf. Romans 5:1. Someone in describing peace said it is "a richer jewel than any prince wears in his crown." We have the power of God to keep us and the peace of God to comfort us. Some other consolations of an imputed righteousness are access to God, acceptance with God, and confidence in God despite many trying and adverse circumstances. We inherit glory, for "whom he justified, them he also glorified." If God does this work, my friends, we must believe it, consider it good, live like it, and enjoy it.

- In justification God has made provision for the glory of his honor, for sin is punished in Christ.
- In justification God has vindicated his holiness, for Christ has fulfilled the law, every jot and tittle.

- In justification God has manifested his truth and faithfulness, for he is just and the justifier of them that believe in Jesus.
- And in justification God has given a consolation for every repenting sinner, which is peace, perfect peace.

Justification is a truth that comes from the heart of God, flows through the whole body of divinity, runs through every part of Christian experience, and operates in every part of practical godliness. To give you an example, Joseph was not only loosed from his prison but was made Lord over the kingdom. So God takes us from the dunghill and sets us up with princes, high above all the guilt that can be mustered against us. Joseph was answerable only to Pharaoh. And we are answerable only to God, and Christ answers to God in our place.

In view of this mighty work of God's grace in Christ, let's raise our voice in harvest praise "unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Let's go from this meeting singing, "Let the righteous be glad, let them rejoice before God; yea, let them exceedingly rejoice" (Psalm 68:3-4).