

Found Righteous (Part 4)
Romans 3:21-31
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I invite you to turn with me again to Romans 3. We are in the very heart of Paul's great letter to the Romans. We're in the paragraph that stands as the epicenter of this magnificent letter. We're studying the issue of justification by faith, how God declares sinners to be right with Him.

A few years ago the Business Insider documented some of the frivolous lawsuits that have been filed in our country. This was not the urban legend list that circulated on the Internet, the so-called Stella Awards. Rather, these were actual, confirmed lawsuits. I read them with a good bit of humor and, in fact, a few times I laughed out loud. And my favorite involved a man named John Leonard who tried to buy a fighter jet with Pepsi points. You remember, a few years ago in the Super Bowl there was an ad where Pepsi introduced that year their Points for Prizes campaign. And to kick off that campaign, the advertisement during the Super Bowl offered a Harrier jet to anyone who could collect 7,000,000 Pepsi points.

Now, for those of us who saw it, it was humorous, we chuckled and knew that it was all tongue in cheek and in good fun. But Leonard decided that this was, after all, advertising and there is such a thing as truth in advertising. And so he was going to hold them to their offer. So the article goes on to describe that it's nearly impossible to collect 7,000,000 Pepsi points from drinking Pepsi, you would die first, I think. So Leonard went about it creatively. He saw in the fine print for the contest rules that you could purchase points for ten cents each. So he only collected 15 points from drinking Pepsi, I guess he wasn't a big fan, and then he sent Pepsi a check for \$700,008.50. He included with the check, that was the equivalent of 7,000,000 points at ten cents each, he included with his check ten dollars for shipping and handling.

When Leonard, in this letter, demanded his prize, a Harrier jet like the one in the television ad, Pepsi, of course, as you would expect, refused, and so he sued Pepsi for breach of contract and fraud. Thankfully, saner minds prevailed in our court system and the court granted Pepsi's motion for summary judgment, finding that no reasonable person would think that a commercial actually offered a Harrier jet as a prize. Leonard wasn't to be defeated, however, he actually appealed to the Second Circuit Court which affirmed the lower court's decision.

Now, when I read that I couldn't help but admire his chutzpah and chuckle a bit at what went on there, and we do smile and laugh at those sort of frivolous lawsuits because they're so outrageous. And obviously also because no one is really hurt, although Pepsi obviously spent a lot of money defending their claims in lawyers' fees.

But when we see real injustice, when we see a defendant who is guilty of a horrible crime escape the penalty that that crime deserves, it's not funny. In fact, we find it repulsive. We line the streets crying out, "No justice, no peace." We feel passionately that no one should escape the penalty of his or her crimes. But in Romans 3 Paul says, that is exactly what the gospel teaches. God declares those who are guilty, those who are criminally guilty, to be righteous and free from the penalty that their sins deserve. And so in this text Paul explains to us how a just judge, how a just God could reach a verdict that at first glance appears so incongruous to His character. Let's read the paragraph together, Romans 3:21.

But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This* was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

This paragraph is, as I mentioned, at the very center of Paul's letter to the Romans. It is at the center of the gospel he preached. It is at the center of our faith. Having shown us in the first three chapters the utter futility of trying to pursue a righteousness of our own, beginning here in verse 21, Paul introduces us to a righteousness that God Himself provides the sinner, the gift of righteousness. Not gained by our own merit or our own effort, but rather, a righteousness earned through the work of Christ and received solely by faith.

Now, the theme of this paragraph becomes clear if you look at verse 24 and those two words, "being justified." Paul describes our receiving of this righteousness as a gift as "being justified." So this paragraph then, and really the gospel itself, is about being justified, or about the doctrine of justification by faith alone. And here Paul explains justification. Specifically, as we've noted, he outlines for us here five foundational truths about this great doctrine.

Now, so far we have considered three of those truths together. Let me just remind you of them. First of all, we learned that justification has always been the divine plan. Verse 21, as he introduces this gift of righteousness he says, "it is being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." It is revealed in the Old Testament. And he'll prove this, when he gets to chapter 4, by citing two Old Testament examples. It's always been the divine plan. Secondly, we learned that justification is appropriated by faith alone in Christ alone. It's not earned, it's not merited by effort, by human works, or goodness. It is rather, received, appropriated by faith exercised in Christ alone.

Now, last week we learn that justification is imperative for all people. Justification is imperative for all people. You see this beginning in the middle of verse 22 and running through the end of verse 23. This is a, sort of, parenthesis in Paul's thought. Notice the middle of verse 22, "for there is no distinction." "All those who believe," those are the ones who receive this gift, Paul says at the beginning of verse 22, and the reason that all who believe receive it is, "for," or because, "there is no distinction." There is no difference between us. There is no difference in our moral state. We are all sinners. There is no difference in our status or standing before God. We are all guilty. There is no difference in our need for justification. Therefore, there is no difference in what is required to secure our right standing before God. We need justification.

Verse 23, "for," because, the reason there is no distinction is that "all have sinned." As God looked at our cumulative past. As He looked at your past life, from the time of birth until today, when He looks at that, as He looks at mine, He sees "sinned." That means that, not merely that we had a few misfortunes, a few mistakes, through our lives, it means that we are sinners. That's the character of our cumulative life to date. That's our true character. Verse 23 adds, "and are falling short of the glory of God." We constantly fail to measure up to God's glory, to arrive at His standard of perfection, to conform to His image. In the past we have sinned and every day, today, we fail to exhibit the God-likeness for which we were created. We are "falling short of the glory of God." So, because of that, justification then is imperative for all people. "For there is no distinction." We all need justification. It's true for all people. It's true for every person.

That brings us today to the fourth foundational truth about justification that Paul teaches us here in this magnificent paragraph. Number four is this, justification flows from the grace of God alone. Justification flows from the grace of God alone. Now, that brings us to verse 24. And verse 24 is the most important verse in the book of Romans. It is the most important verse to understand the gospel. If you don't understand Romans 3:24, you don't understand the gospel Paul taught, you don't understand the truth of salvation, you don't understand Christianity. This is the epicenter of our faith. Let's look at it together.

By the way, let me just say, this verse is also about salvation. We're talking about justification, but justification is nothing other than the way by which we are rescued or saved spiritually. So, those terms in some senses are interchangeable. Justification is part of the salvation that God produces in our lives. So let's see how God does this.

Now notice, first of all, for the first time in this letter Paul uses the word justify in the sense of to declare someone righteous. It is, as we've noted, a judicial verdict that God renders on a person the moment that person believes in His Son. He says, righteous, forgiven. Notice, he says, "being justified." That isn't because justification is some kind of process. He uses the present tense because he wants to underscore the fact that this is not a verdict we wait on for the day of judgment. God will render a verdict on the day of judgment. But in justification, He renders that same verdict on us that day, the moment we believe. Righteous.

Now, if you aren't careful, you can easily misunderstand the connection between verses 23 and 24. In fact, if you put the two verses together, it can almost sound like Paul has become a universalist, that he believes everyone will eventually be justified. Look at it, verse 23, "all have sinned and all fall short of the glory of God," and if you misread it you could come up with, "and all are being justified as a gift by His grace." Now obviously, that's contrary to what Paul has taught in the first three chapters of this letter. So what do we do with this? Well, based on the Greek grammar, I think the best way to understand Paul's thought here is that, from the middle of verse 22 to the end of verse 23, you have a sort of parentheses. In fact, you can either, in your mind, or if you write in your Bible, maybe put a little parenthesis at the end, or excuse me, at the beginning of the phrase in verse 22, "for there is no distinction," just before that. And then put a parenthesis at the end of verse 23. Now, what that does is it connects "being justified" in verse 24 back to the middle of verse 22, with "all those who believe."

So it can read like this: All those who are believing are the ones who are being justified as a gift by His grace. All those who are believing are the ones who are being justified. Now, what does Paul mean here? When he says that all who are justified are "justified as a gift by His grace," his point is that justification is entirely of God from beginning to end. It is truly an act of God. Notice how he describes it, "being justified as a gift." That describes how God justifies. The word is "freely." It is translated "as a gift." But if you want a little more insight into that word, it's fascinating, Jesus uses the same Greek word in John 15:25 when he says, "'THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.'" That's the same Greek word, "'WITHOUT A CAUSE.'"

So Paul is saying here, we are being justified without a cause, that is, a cause in us. There is nothing in us that caused God to justify us. It instead is freely. It's as a gift. It's without payment. Gratis. For nothing. It is entirely free to us. It is without a cause in us. We simply receive it as a gift. Unmerited, undeserved.

Now, why would God declare sinners, who have lived in a state of rebellion against Him their entire lives, to be righteous? What could possibly motivate God to extend the gift of righteousness to those who are His enemies? Well, Paul explains it, "being justified as a gift by His grace." "By His grace." You see, while there is no cause in us. There is a cause in God that motivates Him to justify us, and that cause is His grace. The wonderful gift of God's righteousness flows to us from the very character of God, from who He is, from a quality in the person of God that He Himself calls grace.

You know, we sing about "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." But I think we understand grace so little. We don't really get grace. What exactly is this quality in God? Well, the typical Christian definition of grace is what? It is God's unmerited favor. Okay, that's okay as far as it goes. It is God's favor, He does good to us, He bestows His favor upon us, even though we didn't merit that favor. That definition only goes half way, because something that we don't merit we can still kind of deserve. Let me give you an example.

Let's say you decide to give a gift to your grandchild, that sweet little innocent, beautiful, cute grandchild. Or, if you're not old enough to have a grandchild, your own child or maybe your nephew, your niece, you're going to give a gift to them because they're just so cute. Now, when you give them that gift they didn't earn it, we understand that, they didn't earn that gift. There was no way they could work for that and accumulate merit to earn that gift. However, we could say in that context, they really deserved it, because they're just so cute. Right? That's not grace. That's not grace.

Grace is that attribute of God, listen carefully, it is that attribute of God that causes Him to find joy and delight in doing good to those who deserve only bad. It's not just that we didn't merit something. It's that we merited exactly the opposite. So justification is not merely a free gift. It is a free gift to those who deserve exactly the opposite of justification. God justifies you when you deserve to be condemned.

Now, when Paul says that our justification is a gift that flows from God's grace, he intends to prove that we don't make the slightest contribution to our acceptance before God; it's grace. One author describes grace this way. He says, "Grace ceases to be grace if God is compelled to bestow it in the presence of human merit." It's not grace if you deserve it. Then he says, "Grace also ceases to be grace if God is compelled to withdraw it in the presence of human demerit. Grace is treating a person without the slightest reference to desert whatsoever, but solely according to the infinite goodness and sovereign purpose of God." That's grace. Grace removes all human contribution to our own salvation or to our own spiritual rescue.

Most Christians don't get this. Because the average Christian, you ask the average Christian to, sort of, picture his salvation. This is how he might describe it. He would say, well, you know, we were on a cruise ship in the middle of the ocean and the captain had said, don't get too near the railing because if you get near the railing you're going to fall off, you're going to be injured, and, you know, we got excited about the scenery and, or maybe we knew we really shouldn't anyway, but we got too close to the railing, or maybe we actually stood on the railing in order to see better and capture the glimpse of what was going on, and so we accidentally fell overboard. And we suddenly found ourselves treading water in a huge ocean in the middle of a raging storm.

And in this scenario our only hope was for God to throw us the life preserver. There we are, flailing in the middle of the ocean, kind of in this mess we made for ourselves, and we need God to throw us the life preserver, and that's what He did. And we saw the life preserver hit the water and we fought and we clawed our way through the waves to get to the life preserver and we locked our arms around it and held on tight and then God grabbed the rope on the other end and He pulled us to safety. That's how most Christians think of salvation.

But that's not an accurate picture of salvation at all. The truth is far different. Imagine how much more difficult our rescue would have been if we were caught at sea floating hopelessly in the middle of the storm, but we were already dead. We had no ability to see our rescuer. We

could not fight our way to the life preserver. We had no strength to lock our arms around the truth that would rescue us, the gospel. Instead, we were sinking hopelessly, without the slightest ability to aid in our rescue whatsoever. Because we were dead. In fact, we were completely unaware that there was any danger. We didn't even know we needed rescue. We were oblivious to the risk to our souls. That was our true condition when God found us.

The way Paul puts it in Ephesians 2:1, "you were dead in your trespasses and sins." Verse 5, "God made you alive." If God hadn't acted we would still be dead, still floating in the sea of our sin, having created that mess for ourselves. That's why Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved." You were dead. God found you dead.

By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, lest any man should boast.

Our salvation, and at the heart of our salvation is justification, had to be entirely of grace. Because we were already dead. Paul wants us to know that God's motive for rescuing us in Romans 3, for justifying us when we were dead and hopeless, there was only one reason, because of His grace. Because there is, in the heart of God, there is something that's true of God, a quality, an attribute of God that finds joy and delight in doing good to those who deserve exactly the opposite. "Being justified as a gift by His grace." Paul's point is that nothing we are, nothing we do, causes God to declare us righteous. Our justification is entirely of God, a gift by His grace.

Maybe you're here this morning and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ. Maybe you have thought you have been, but you're beginning to see that isn't true. Or maybe you know you aren't. Listen, if you want a right standing before God, if you want to be right with God your creator, who holds your very next breath in His hand, if you want to be reconciled to Him, you have to come to Him. You have to humble yourself and come to Him and say something like this,

O God, You made me, You sustain my life every moment that I live. You give me all the good things that I enjoy and have embezzled from You and have prostituted. You are good and I have returned that goodness by sinning against you, by consistently falling short of the glory for which You created me. I have sinned against You even though You have the right to tell me how to live. I've made my own way. I've made my own choices. But I desperately, O God, want to be right with You. I want to know You. I long for my sins to be forgiven, for You to declare me right with Yourself. And so I repent of my sins. I renounce all of my own merit, my achievements, my efforts, my good works, my baptism, my personal righteousness. I renounce everything I am. I renounce everything I've done. And I trust in Jesus Christ alone as my only hope of heaven and of a right standing before You. I put my faith, not in myself, but in His perfect life lived for

me. I put my faith in His substitutionary death, died in the place of my own soul. And I commit to follow Him from this day forward as my Lord. O God, I want to receive a right standing before You as a gift based on the work of Christ alone, as an expression of Your grace.

Now, those words are not a magic formula. A prayer doesn't save you, God saves you through Christ. But I can promise you this, if you will come to God sincerely like that, crying out to Him like that, you can be justified as a gift by His grace.

Let me talk to you who are believers, most of us here this morning. Do you ever think that because of something you have done, you have somehow merited God's favor? Or, oppositely, do you sometimes conclude that because you have sinned that you somehow forfeited God's favor for that day? You are not living in the light of justification by grace. Your merits do not compel God to give you His grace and your demerits do not compel God to withdraw His grace. God treats you without regard to your merits or demerits in any way. He treats you without regard to your deserts whatsoever. And until you come to understand that, you won't have a solid base for growing in your Christian life and experience. I can say this on a personal level. It really wasn't until I came to understand the truth of justification that we're studying in this section that my own spiritual life stabilized.

Sinclair Ferguson, in his excellent book, *The Basic Doctrines of the Christian life*, puts it this way. He says, "Not only is justification the article of the standing or falling church, but also of the standing or falling Christian. Probably more trouble is caused in the Christian life by an inadequate or mistaken view of this doctrine than any other. When the child of God loses his sense of peace with God, finds his concern for others dried up, or generally finds his sense of the sheer goodness and grace of God diminished, it is from this fountain that he has ceased to drink. Conversely, if we can gain a solid grounding here, we have the foundation for a life of peace and joy."

Listen, if you want to grow in holiness, if you want to grow in likeness to Christ, it begins by laying a solid foundation in your life of understanding this. You need to think about, you need to meditate on, you need to come to truly understand the reality of your justification as a gift by His grace. Justification flows entirely from the grace of God alone.

Now, that brings us to Paul's final key truth about this great doctrine. Number five, justification is accomplished by the work of Christ alone. Justification is accomplished by the work of Christ alone. This point begins in the middle of verse 24 and runs down through verse 26. We're not going to cover all of that today, I just want to introduce it to you. Justification is the heart of the gospel. And in these verses we come to the heart of justification. Again, I want you to notice just in verse 24, the contrast. Do you see the contrast in verse 24? Justification costs us nothing. It is without cost. It is a gift. It comes to us gratis, for nothing. That's the first half of verse 24.

But although it's free to us, verse 24 goes on to say, it is most certainly not free. It cost God the Father His Son. It cost God the Son the glories of heaven, the separation of His human soul from His Father on the cross, the incalculable physical and spiritual sufferings that He endured during those dark hours, and ultimately, it cost Him His life. Justification is only possible because of the work of Jesus Christ. It cost Him everything. Even though it costs us nothing.

Now on what basis, on what grounds, can God be righteous, can He be a righteous judge and yet declare sinners to be righteous? Look at Romans 4:5. And I want you to see how God describes Himself here. Paul says, "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him," now notice how God described Himself, "Him who justifies," or declares righteous, "the ungodly." Do you see a problem with that? You should, if you're a thinking person. You should see a huge problem with that. Some people think that, you know, God, because He's God, can just, sort of, wave His hand and say, okay, you're a wicked, ungodly, unrighteous person, you deserve my eternal wrath - pardoned. God can't do that. That's contrary to His nature. It's contrary to His Word.

That brings us back to where we started this morning. How can God be a just judge and justify the ungodly? He says judges should never do this. Deuteronomy 25:1, "'If there is a dispute between men, they go to court, the judges decide their case, the judges,'" listen to this, "'must justify,'" whom? "'The righteous and condemn the wicked.'" This is a basic principle of justice. In fact, in Proverbs 17:15 God says it even more strongly, "He who justifies the wicked," you recognize that from Romans 4? "He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD." He hates judges who justify the wicked. Isaiah 5:23, God pronounces judgment against those "who justify the wicked for a bribe." And the passage we read this morning in our Scripture reading, God's great self-revelation in Exodus 34:7, what does He say? "I will by no means leave the guilty unpunished."

God is a God of unwavering justice. He can't help but be just. And justice demands that sinners be punished, that the wicked suffer the penalty they deserve, just like a good judge, a human judge, makes sure they get the penalty they deserve. This is God's very nature. John Stott writes, "How on earth can Paul affirm that God does what He forbids others to do? That He does what He says He will Himself never do? That He does it habitually? And that He even designates Himself the God who justifies the ungodly?" Stott concludes this, "Without the cross the justification of the unjust would be unjustified, immoral, and therefore, impossible." God just simply couldn't do it. It's contrary to His nature. He can't let the guilty go unpunished.

So think about, if I can say this respectfully, the conundrum God found Himself in. Obviously, we can't make ourselves just before God, so God as the righteous judge then, was left with only three options. Option number one, He could condemn us all. God could do that. He would be just to do that. He wouldn't violate His justice if He just said, you all go to hell. Option number two is God could compromise His own justice and simply pardon us. But God could never do

that because that's contrary to His nature. And so the third option was to find a way in His wisdom to, at the same time, both discharge His justice and yet pardon us. And that is exactly what He did in Christ. He found a way to be, as verse 26 puts it, at the same time, "just and the justifier of the ungodly." And it was accomplished through the work of Jesus Christ.

Now, beginning in the middle of verse 24 and running down through verse 26, Paul captures for us, the work of Christ. And he does so in two extraordinarily important words. I want you to note them. Verse 24, note the word "redemption." And in verse 25, note the word "propitiation." Those two words present to us what we need to understand about how Christ accomplished our justification in His work. I want to look at those two words.

In the time that we have left today I just want to consider briefly the first word, the word redemption there in verse 24, this word is an overview of what Christ accomplished. Look again at verse 24, "being justified as a gift by His grace through," circle that word, underscore that word, there is no more important word in the New Testament than that word. The only way a just God can declare righteous those who are ungodly, without violating His own justice, is that little word "through," by means of, "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." God accomplished our justification "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

Now, the Greek word that's translated redemption is a word that has two parts to it. Part of it is a very recognizable word if you've had any Greek whatsoever. It comes from the word *luo*, which is the word you use to memorize all the paradigms of the different verb endings in Greek. It means to loose. The other word that's included in this word is a word that has the idea of a ransom, a ransom paid. And so the word came to mean, and it's used this way both in secular Greek as well as in the Old Testament and the New Testament, it means to loose or to deliver, or to rescue someone through the payment of a price.

In the Septuagint this word was often used of the release of slaves for whom someone had generously made the payment to free them. In secular Greek it is used most often in the context of literal bondage. Sometimes of condemned criminals who are redeemed by a price. Sometimes prisoners of war. But most often of slaves again. That is, the redemption of slaves from their slaver because someone paid a price for their release.

At its heart then, this word redemption expresses the idea, listen carefully to this, this is amazing to me, it expresses the idea of the freedom that a prisoner or a slave experiences after someone pays the price and they are released. When it comes to our salvation, this word describes the action of God in which He sets sinners free when the necessary payment has been made to Him through the necessary work of Christ.

Now, what does God redeem us, or set us free, from? You know, we talk about being saved and people say, I don't need to be saved, saved from what? Rescued from what? Well, there are a lot of ways to answer that question, but I want you to see the most important one in Romans 5:8,

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Now, what did Christ accomplish in His death? Verse 9, “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved,” or rescued, “from,” what? “From the wrath of *God* through Him.”

You see, we can talk about our being rescued, our being redeemed, our being set free from the slavery of sin. And sin is slavery. You think you’re free, you’re not free. If you’re enslaved to sin, if you’re committing sin, Jesus said, “the one who commits sin is a slave of sin,” you’re not free, you’re doing exactly what he wants you to do and you couldn’t stop if you wanted to. You’re a slave.

We can talk about being redeemed from the slavery of sin, but the bigger issue is what Paul points out here. We are redeemed from the just condemnation and wrath of God against our sin, our status of unrighteous before Him, from sin’s eternal punishment in hell, that’s what we are redeemed from, freed from. That’s what Christ freed us from.

What was the payment? In redemption there’s a payment. What was the payment Christ made? If you’re still in Romans 5:9 you see it there, “we have been justified by His blood.” Go back to chapter 3 verse 25, Paul makes the same point, the payment is “in His blood.” Now, it’s not that there was something magical in the blood of Christ. You know, there are some who believe, there’s, you know, the angels collected a vial of Jesus’ blood from the cross and, you know, it’s in heaven somewhere. That’s not what the New Testament teaches. No, the blood stands in the place of His violent outpouring of His life in death as a sacrifice.

This is how it’s expressed, for example, in Mark 10:45, “The Son of Man came to give,” what? “His life as a ransom for sin.” Ephesians 1:7, “In Him we have,” here’s our word, “redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace.” First Peter 1:18-19, “You were not redeemed,” you weren’t bought, “with perishable things like silver and gold.” God didn’t come up with some monetary value that He had to charge for your redemption. No, Peter says instead, you were bought, “you were redeemed with the precious blood as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.” It was His violent death.

To whom was the payment made? Not, as is popularly believed, to Satan. No, the payment of the death of Christ was made to God. We will look at this more next week in the next verse. But in Ephesians 5:2 we read, “Christ loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God.” Payment was made to God. Christ’s death was the ransom payment that Christ made to God that takes the place of the payment that you owed to God, your own eternal death, your own eternal judgment. God demanded a payment for sin, not to Satan but to Himself. “The soul that sins shall die,” He says. He says, I can’t do anything but punish the guilty, I have to. But in His grace He created a plan in which His own Son would become the payment.

What did Christ's payment to the Father secure? According to verse 25, that payment produces "propitiation." It's a word we will look at more next week. It simply means the complete satisfaction of God's just anger, completely satisfied. Verse 26 adds that Christ's death also made it possible for God to justify us. Notice what he says, "so that God could be both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." This is our justification.

John Stott writes, "When God justifies sinners He is not declaring bad people to be good, or saying that they are not sinners after all. Instead, He is pronouncing them legally righteous, free from any liability to the broken law because He Himself, in His Son, has borne the penalty of their lawbreaking." In other words, "we are justified by His blood."

Now how is this redemption that Jesus accomplished applied to us, or received by us? Notice the rest of verse 24, "being justified through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." It's in Christ. I think there are two ideas there. One is that it is only through the work of Christ that we are redeemed. But I think also implied, it is only through our being connected to Christ, through our relationship with Christ, that we can be redeemed. It's in Christ Jesus.

Christian, think about this. Think about this. We were condemned criminals. This is God's perspective. We were condemned criminals. He had already sentenced us to eternal death. We were living on death row. That's the story of our lives. We were simply waiting for the axe to fall, for the sentence to be carried out, but Christ redeemed us. He delivered us. He rescued us. He set us free. And the only way He could do that was through the payment of the price of His own suffering and separation from the Father, and death. And He did it. He did it for you because He loved you.

Lloyd Jones writes, "There is nothing in heaven or earth which is in any way comparable to this. That I can say, the Son of God loved me, gave Himself for me, gave His life a ransom for me. His blood was shed that I might be forgiven. Oh, the riches of His grace. Oh, the abundance of His love." And then Lloyd Jones offers this really magnificent counsel. Listen to him. He says, "Go to the cross. Stand there and look at it. Survey it with Isaac Watts. 'See from His head, His hands, His feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down.' Stay there until you see that you never have had or ever will have, a vestige of righteousness, that all your goodness is as filthy rags. But see your sins laid on Him and see Him paying the price, the purchase price of your redemption, your salvation. Fall at His feet. Worship Him, praise Him, give yourself to Him saying, 'love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.'" "Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Let's pray together.

Father, those of us here who have experienced this justification, this redemption, we are overwhelmed by Your grace, by Your mercy, by the free offer of salvation in Christ, by the fact that there's nothing we can do to earn it. There's nothing we have done to merit it. It simply grows out of, flows from Your own grace. O God, we thank You that there is, in Your person, in Your character, this quality that would delight in doing good to us who deserve only bad.

Father, we thank You. Help us to live in praise and worship, help us as Lloyd Jones counseled us, to see our Lord dying there and to fall down and worship Him and praise Him and to live for Him. “Love so amazing, so divine, does demand our soul, our lives, our all.” Help us to open our mouths and share this amazing news with the people around us.

Father, I pray for those here this morning, and I know there are some Lord, You know that I pray for them often, who don't know You. O Lord, help them to see. Help them to see the slavery of sin. Help them to see the bounty of Your heart, the goodness of Your heart, how You open up this invitation to them to be reconciled with You through the work of Your Son. And may this be the day when they run to You and throw themselves before You, pleading for Your mercy in Christ. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.