

We Have Been Justified

Isaiah 53:11

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In the spring, as I was trying to decide what I would include in the summer series, trying to determine, really to finalize, a list of those foundational truths that a large portion of today's church has forgotten, I made a list and I pretty much stuck with that list. But there were two crucial truths that I believed from the beginning really belonged on the list, but that I seriously considered dropping. The first of those has to do with the bondage of the will, which is absolutely foundational to a right understanding of salvation. But since we just spent a couple of years on Romans 1 to 3, I decided I would skip that. And if you have any question about how foundational that truth is, or the fact that the human will is bound and cannot decide for God apart from divine grace, then I encourage you to go and listen to at least chapter 3 of Romans, verses 9 through 20, and I think your questions will be answered there. So I decided not to deal with that issue in the series even though I really believe it belongs in the list.

I was tempted to leave a second truth, that is truly foundational and is truly forgotten today, off the list as well, also because of where we are in Romans. But I just couldn't do it. Because when I look back at my own spiritual journey, it was only after I came to understand this truth and it's really far reaching profound implications, that I experienced for the first time lasting assurance of my own salvation. I can honestly say that it was understanding this truth that has been the prime motivation in my own pursuit of spiritual progress and holiness. It is also, this truth, the central pillar of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. If this doctrine is not true, then there is no salvation and all of us here this morning will die in our sins. This truth alone provides the grounds on which you and I can gain a right standing before God. It is truly foundational.

And yet sadly, although I grew up in the church, my dad was a music director and came to Christ before I was born so we were literally in the church a minimum of three times a week and often times more often than that, we were in conservative Bible believing churches, some of them Baptist others of them Bible churches, and in spite of that I can honestly say I had never heard a single message on this issue until late in my life at college.

It is, without question, one of the most forgotten truths in today's church and yet it is a truth to which we must hold fast. So I simply just could not ignore it in this series. You've probably guessed by now, I'm talking about the truth that we have been justified. Job asked this question, "How can a man be in the right before God?" His friend Bildad put it this way, "How can a man be just with God? Or how can he be clean who is born of a woman?" This has always been mankind's most important question and, of course, the most detailed answer to that question, the

question of how to gain a right standing before God, is found in the book of Romans where we are studying together, from which we're taking a summer break.

But you'll remember that in Romans 3 Paul argues that the Old Testament witnessed to this truth. And as we'll see in the fall, in Romans 4 he cites both Abraham and David as examples of that. In other words, Paul built his case for justification on the Old Testament. He told the Romans, in effect, this is not a new idea; its roots are buried deep in the rich soil of Old Testament revelation.

Now, there are a number of Old Testament texts that deal with justification, but this morning I want to focus on one foundational Old Testament passage. Turn with me, if you would, to Isaiah 53, Isaiah 53. As you're turning, let me remind you of the context, Isaiah wrote some 700 years before the birth of our Lord. His name means "Yahweh is salvation" and that is really the major theme of his prophecy, "Yahweh is salvation." He describes God's rescue, His saving of His people from temporal issues, the nations around them, but more importantly, as he unfolds his theme, he explains that Yahweh will spiritually rescue a remnant of Earth's people from the just penalty of their sin. And He's going to accomplish this salvation through a unique person that Isaiah calls the "Servant of Yahweh."

In the second half of Isaiah's prophecy there are four passages that focus on this person and His mission. These four passages theologians call the servant songs. In the fourth and last of these servant passages, we find the truth we want to study together this morning. This final song, the fourth and final song about the servant in Isaiah, begins in Isaiah 52:13 and runs all the way through chapter 53. So Isaiah 53 then is part of the fourth song about this special Servant who will come on a spiritual rescue mission for God.

This fourth song consists of five stanzas of three verses each. It details for us the suffering of this Servant who will come and why He will suffer. But in the fifth and final stanza Isaiah explains the results of His suffering, what the suffering of this Servant will accomplish. Let's read it together, Isaiah 53 beginning in verse 10,

But the Lord was pleased
To crush Him, putting Him to grief;
If He would render Himself as a guilt offering,
*[There is the reason for His death, He is presenting himself as a guilt offering,
His soul, literally, as a guilt offering.]*
He will see His offspring,
He will prolong His days,
*[Those two phrases imply the resurrection. "He will die as a guilt offering, but
He will see His seed, He will prolong His days."]*
And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.
As a result of the anguish of His soul,

He will see it and be satisfied;
By His knowledge the Righteous One,
My Servant, will justify the many,
As He will bear their iniquities.
Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,
And He will divide the booty with the strong;
Because He poured out Himself to death,
And was numbered with the transgressors;
Yet He himself bore the sin of many,
And interceded for the transgressors.

That is what the Servant's suffering accomplished.

Now, you'll notice in the beginning of verse 10 we learned that His suffering pleased the Father. But then from the middle of verse 10 down through verse 12, Isaiah explains to us the results of the Servant's suffering that accrued to the Servant Himself, how He benefits from His work. But buried in this final stanza is also a reference to us. Isaiah explains here how believers benefit from the life and death of Yahweh's Servant. In the second half of verse 11 Isaiah focuses on the application of the life and the death of the Servant to you and to me. And I want us to examine it together.

Look again at the second half of verse 11, "By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities." The theme of that sentence is found in its main verb, justify. This is about justification. One profound result of the suffering of the Servant of Yahweh is that by His suffering He earned the right to justify sinners. We can now be justified, we can enjoy a right standing before God, because of the suffering of the Servant. Now, in this brief statement, the second half of verse 11, Isaiah teaches us four profound truths about justification. Just one little sentence and yet it is full of rich truth about the justification we enjoy. Let's look at these truths together.

Truth number one, the first truth that we learn about our justification here is that the Servant accomplishes it, the Servant accomplishes it. A person God simply calls My Servant will accomplish our justification. From the very beginning of human history God made it clear that a person would ultimately accomplish redemption from sin. In Genesis 3:15, when there were only two human beings on the planet, God told Satan, the serpent, in Adam and Eve's presence, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed," and then he says this, "He," a male human, "will bruise you on the head." We could translate that, "He," this male human who will come, "will crush the life out of you." A male human would come and deal with the problem of sin. But He would be a most unusual person because He would be born of the seed of the woman, a very subtle reminder of what we learned later, that He would be born of a virgin.

As the Old Testament unfolds we discover more and more about this person. We learn that He will be of the nation that comes from the loins of Abraham, He will be Jewish. We learn in Genesis 49 that He will be of the tribe of Judah, the tribe of kings. We discover that He will be of the family of David. In 2 Samuel 7 we discover when He will be born. In Daniel's prophecy Daniel lays out a timeline that falls during the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Micah tells us where He will be born, "in Bethlehem."

But the high point of the Old Testament revelation about this person who will come to crush Satan and to redeem His people is found here in Isaiah. Go back to Isaiah 7:14, very familiar passage, as Isaiah speaks, as the Lord speaks through Isaiah to Ahaz, the wicked king of Judah, he says to him, in verse 14, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel," meaning God with us. The New Testament authors tell us that this was a prophecy of Jesus of Nazareth and His virgin birth.

Turn over to chapter 9 verse 6. Here again we get a glimpse of this person who will come to redeem a remnant, "a child will be born to us," that is, to the Jewish nation, "a son," God will, as a gift of His grace, "give," and He will be a mighty leader, "the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called," here's His character, in the character of His reign, He will be "a Wonder of a Counselor," He will rule in wisdom and He will actually be "Mighty God." He will be God Himself. He will be the "Eternal Father," not here meaning the first person of the Trinity, but rather He will eternally be a father to His people. As a ruler He will be a benevolent ruler who cares for His people like a father. And He will be the only "Prince" who will truly bring "Peace" and "there will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace." He will reign forever on David's throne, over this planet for a thousand years and over a new earth for eternity.

That is whom Isaiah means when he speaks of the Servant. And if you doubt that, listen to the words of Jesus Himself, because during His earthly ministry Jesus applied Isaiah 53 to Himself. Listen to what Jesus says in Luke 22:37, "I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me," and then He quotes from Isaiah 53:12, "HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS," and He adds, "for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment." Jesus claimed to be the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. He is the one who will justify.

Now, in other places we learn that technically it is God the Father who justifies. Here, Isaiah means that Christ by His work would achieve, or accomplish, our justification. He accomplishes our justification. I think most of us sitting here have no idea how earth shattering that is, because we have come to embrace the Christian faith. But do you understand that the Christian faith alone teaches this? All the world's religions, without exception, every world religion that has ever existed or exists today, teaches that we are made right with God by human achievement. Christianity alone says our stand before God is based solely on divine accomplishment. There is

nothing you and I have to do, there's nothing we can do, to gain a right standing before God. The Servant has already done it; He accomplished it.

The second truth we learn from Isaiah about our justification is that a judge declares it. It's filled with the language of the court room. This was especially meaningful to me this week as I studied because I have the great joy and pleasure of beginning jury duty tomorrow. It's the language of the court room. Look at verse 11, "My Servant, will justify." The word justify is a legal court room word. Now, it shouldn't surprise us that the Scripture is using legal terminology to describe our relationship with God because Old Testament writers do that again and again. We find in the Old Testament that God is the law giver and not only is He the law giver, but He is the judge who impartially determines our conformity or lack of conformity to the law. Exodus 23:7, God says, "I will not acquit the guilty." Exodus 34:7, "I will by no means leave the guilty unpunished."

Our God is a God of absolute, unwavering, unbended, unsullied justice. Justice is such an important part of God's character that He simply will not tolerate human judges who pervert justice. Listen to what God says about judges who do that. Proverbs 17:15, speaking of human judges, "He who justifies the wicked," the one who declares righteous the law breaker, "and the one who condemns," or declares guilty the law keeper, "the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to the LORD." God says, I hate human judges who do this. And don't you for a moment believe that there won't be a reckoning that every human judge will stand before God and give an account for whether or not he did this.

So understand this, the only way a truly righteous judge can declare someone to be righteous is to evaluate the evidence and determine that that person has, in fact, kept the law. The only legitimate grounds for being justified is truly being in conformity to the law. Now, that brings us back to Isaiah 53 and to the Hebrew word here translated justify. It means to declare someone to be righteous. In the Old Testament, to justify, that Hebrew word, is the opposite of the Hebrew word to condemn. Condemn simply means to render a guilty verdict and to enact the penalty that guilty verdict deserves. So justify is when you examine the evidence and you find someone's kept the law and you declare them to be right before the law. To condemn is, you examine the evidence, you find someone to have broken the law, and you declare them guilty of having broken the law.

In fact, listen to Deuteronomy 25:1. These words are used in the context of human courtrooms. "In a dispute between men they go to court." And when they go to court, God says this, judges are to "justify the righteous and condemn the wicked." To justify then means that a judge has weighed the evidence and he's rendered a just verdict that that person has, in fact, kept the law. So in Isaiah 53:11 whom does God declare to be in perfect conformity to His law? Well, in verse 11 you'll notice they're simply called, "the many." But notice how Isaiah describes them in the rest of Isaiah 53. Notice in verse 3, these people who are justified, "do not esteem," do not

value, the Servant that God sent. In verse 4 they are said to be terminally ill. It's a metaphor for human sinfulness. In fact, he uses it that way back in Isaiah 1, he describes sin as having these open oozing sores. In verse 5 these people are said to be guilty of "transgressions," that is, acts of rebellion against the law, they've transgressed the law, and "iniquities," acts of moral twistedness. Verse 6, they deliberately left God's ways to pursue their own ways, and in verse 11 the many that He justifies, or declares to be righteous, are those who are marked by iniquities.

Now, if you're thinking with me, you should see a huge problem here. God appears to be doing the very thing that He demanded never be done, the very thing that He says He hates, a judge declaring the wicked to be righteous. How can this be? How can God, who never perverts justice, declare guilty sinners to be righteous? It's contrary to His nature, contrary to His justice, or at least it appears to be. How can He do it? Well, Isaiah has the answer, and the answer is by means, and I choose my words carefully here, the most important concept in Scripture, imputation.

That brings us to the third great truth about justification, imputation enables it. This is the only way it's possible, is through imputation. Here's another one of those concepts that you won't hear in churches where all they hear about is how to improve your relationships and your sex life. But this is foundational to the gospel, imputation. The word imputation is a financial term. It comes from an old Latin word that means to settle an account. The verb form is to impute. It means to credit something to someone's account, to post something in their ledger. In Romans 4, as we'll see in the fall, as Paul expounds what justification means, he uses the Greek term that means to credit or to impute 11 times in that one passage. So clearly then, imputation is the heart and soul of justification.

Although the words impute and credit don't appear here in Isaiah 53, the concept absolutely permeates this passage. In fact, what we find here is double imputation. There are two great transactions of imputation. In the first transaction God credits our sin to Christ, God credits our sin to Christ. You see, even though we have committed sins, God doesn't credit them to our account. Even though we committed them He doesn't put them in our account.

Listen to Paul in Romans 4:8 quoting David from Psalm 32. He says, "BLESSED," oh to be envied, "IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN," literally, "THE LORD DOESN'T CREDIT TO HIM." That is something to be envied isn't it? When God says, you committed this sin, I know you committed it, but I'm not going to put it in your account as though you committed it. Second Corinthians 5:19, in the gospel, Paul says, God doesn't count, He doesn't impute, He doesn't credit our trespasses to us. So even though we've committed sins, God doesn't credit them to our account.

What does He do with them? Well instead, God credits our sins to Christ. Look at verse 11 again. "By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as," notice this, "as He will bear their iniquities." Now, the word bear means to carry a load. This is what Jesus did with our sins and notice, not our sins in general, but our specific sins. You know, you

know you have sinned. Your conscience tells you, you have sinned. In fact, if you stop for a moment and think about it you can come up with a list of sins for which your conscience accuses you.

But let me promise you something, God's list is a lot longer than your list. Because when God sees us apart from Christ, He doesn't see us as just sinners. God doesn't say, yes, you're a sinner, you're a sinner, you're a sinner. He does do that, but that's not all He does. God sees sins. You see, God has never forgotten a single wicked thought you have ever embraced in your mind. He's never forgotten it and He never will. God has never forgotten a single sinful word you have spoken. You may have forgotten it long ago, but God hasn't forgotten it. He remembers every single one of them. And God remembers every sinful act you have ever committed, every one of them without exception. Buried in the omniscience of God is a perfect record of every wicked thought, every evil word, every wicked deed done.

And here's the amazing truth of the gospel, the Servant shouldered, notice what he says, "their iniquities," plural. God credited every one of those sins in the perfect omniscience of His divine mind, He took every one that He knows about, and He knows about them all, and He credited them to Christ and Christ bore them, Christ shouldered them as our substitute.

Go back to the central paragraph in this final servant song, verses 4 to 6. Of the five stanzas here's the center one, and it deals with this issue of justification. "Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried," using the language of a terminal disease, he says, He bore the consequences of our sin. And yet what did the people around the cross in Jesus' time think? Well, they thought He was stricken by God, He's getting what He deserves, He's a sinner, this is what God's doing to Him. But Isaiah said, that's not true, verse 5, the truth is "He was pierced through for our acts of rebellion." Notice again the plural, "He was crushed for our iniquities," for our acts of moral twistedness; "The chastening for our shalom fell upon Him, and," by His stripes, "by His scourging we are spiritually healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray," all of humanity, "each one of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the guilt of us all to strike Him."

First Peter 2:24, Peter says, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross." Second Corinthians 5:21, "God made Christ who knew no sin to be sin for us." Now, don't misunderstand, Jesus didn't become a sinner on the cross. "He knew no sin." Instead, God treated him as if he were a sinner. More specifically, on the cross, for everyone who believes or ever will believe in Christ, God treated Christ as if he were you.

You want to know what you would get in eternity? You want to know what you would get if you went to the judgment without Christ? Look at what God did to His beloved Son on the cross. That was what you had coming, and more. On the cross God credited my sin to Christ and treated Him as if he had committed every single one of my individual sins. He drank the

wrath of God everyone deserved, every sin deserved. Romans 5 says, we are “justified by His blood,” that is, by His violent death in our place, bearing the guilt of our sins.

But there’s a second transaction of imputation, God not only credits our sins to Christ, but God credits Christ’s righteousness to us. The New Testament, of course, makes this crystal clear. Paul, in Romans 4:6, says, “God,” here’s our word, “credits righteousness apart from works.” He puts it in on our ledger, He puts righteousness in our ledger, and He puts our sins in Christ’s ledger. When he says, “He credits righteousness,” he means this, listen carefully, this righteousness is not our own, it is entirely that of someone else deposited into our account.

This is absolutely crucial to understand. Justification has nothing whatsoever to do with any righteousness infused into me or produced in me. Instead, it is righteousness credited to my account. Just as Jesus was treated as if He were a sinner, He didn’t commit my sins, He was treated as if He had committed my sins. In the same way, I’m not made right with God by my acts of righteousness, but by the righteousness of another credited to me. It’s credited to our account.

Now, who’s righteousness? Where does this come from? Well, as we’ve seen in Romans 3, it’s often called in Scripture, the “righteousness of God.” But more precisely, it is the righteousness of Christ. First Corinthians 1:30, “Christ became to us righteousness.” Second Corinthians 5:21, “God made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf,” there’s the first part of imputation, “so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him,” there’s the second part of imputation, the second transaction.

And here in Isaiah 53:11 we can see this clearly as well. Look at it again. The expression, “the Righteous One,” is emphatically placed in the original language. In fact, in the Hebrew text two almost identical Hebrew words stand next to each other deliberately. We could translate them like this, “the Righteous One will declare righteous the many.” Isaiah, you see, is making a crucial distinction between “the Righteous One” and the many. There is a huge gulf that separates them. The One possesses intrinsic personal righteousness. The many, what do they possess? Only iniquities. But in this verse an incredible exchange takes place. The Servant carries their iniquities so that in God’s eyes they no longer have them and in exchange the many receive the righteousness of the Servant.

This is what Paul says in Philippians 3:9. He says, “I want to be found in Christ, not having a righteousness of my own derived from law keeping, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.” Now folks, this is absolutely essential. The righteousness that is the basis of your justification is not your righteousness. It’s the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is the crux of what the reformers meant by one of the great *Solas* of the Reformation, *Solus Christus*, In Christ Alone. You know what they meant by that? I am justified through the righteousness of Christ alone, not my own righteousness. You see, Roman Catholicism taught and still teaches that our God enabled good works contribute to

our right standing before God. The reformer says, they said, that's not what the Bible teaches. Our right standing before God has nothing to do with our own righteousness. Our only hope is what they called an alien righteousness.

Listen to Martin Luther, "Christian righteousness is not a righteousness that is within us and clings to us as a quality or virtue does, but it is an alien righteousness entirely outside us. Namely, Christ Himself is our essential righteousness and complete satisfaction." Folks, our only hope is *Solus Christus*, the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone placed into, deposited into our account by the gracious work of God our Redeemer.

Now, I have to share with you at this point a story from my life that really helped me come to grips with the truth of justification. Even though many of you are very familiar with this story, I ask you just to tolerate it again. Because for me, it brought the truth of this, of justification to bear on my own soul. Years ago, shortly after I graduated from seminary, I was a poor just post seminary graduate with very little, and money was precious at that point because we had so little of it. I received my bank statement in the mail one day and I noticed as I was going through it that there was a deposit of 200 dollars that I knew I had not made. Now, 200 dollars was a lot of money, and that was, at first, exciting and then I realized, that's not my money, I need to make sure, you know, as a Christian I need to be honest here, I need to contact the bank. So I felt compelled to try to correct it.

I went and visited the branch where I did business. I explained the situation, talked to the teller, talked to one of the other persons that was working there in an office, explained, and I got the same answer. So I made some phone calls to the main office and I wrote a couple of letters and every time I got the same response. It was something like this, "Sir," you know, that sort of condescending "Sir," "this must be your mistake, because we checked our records and you made that deposit." And so I spent the money. But at the time I said to Sheila my wife, I said, you know, this is a sweet deal, because if I can get somebody else's deposits, maybe somebody else will get my bills. Later it would occur to me that that is exactly what happens in justification. Christ gets all of my bills and I get all of His deposits.

Justification is a magnificent exchange, Christ gets the blame for my sin and I get the credit for His obedience. He gets my declaration of guilty and I get His declaration of righteous. He suffers the punishment for my sin and I receive the reward for His obedience. On the cross God treated Jesus as if He had committed every single one of my sins so that forever He could treat me as if I had perfectly kept God's law, down to every detail of every day like Christ did. Praise God for imputation.

But not all sinners will be justified. So by what means do some sinners come to enjoy justification? Well there's a fourth truth that Isaiah teaches here in this text and that's that faith receives it, faith receives it. Notice how the sentence begins, "By His knowledge." Literally, the Hebrew text says, "By the knowledge of Him My servant will justify the many." Now, that

Hebrew phrase can be understood in one of two ways. It could mean by what the Servant Himself knows, by His knowledge of certain things, by His experience, He will justify. It can also mean, by our knowledge of the Servant, by our knowing Him, and that's how many, even most commentators understand it, by our knowledge of Christ we receive justification.

Now, in the Old Testament to know someone involved relationship. For example, "Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived." There was a close relationship pictured, in their case, even by the sexual union. So, this knowledge of the Servant here is the Old Testament equivalent of the New Testament faith. There's a relationship, because we know Him. Isaiah is saying that we can only be declared righteous through our knowledge of and our faith in the Servant and His work. We receive the gift of Jesus' righteousness, credited to our account, by faith alone.

As Paul would put it in Galatians 2:16, "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified." Oh, and by the way, faith itself is not a work. You never hear Scripture say we are justified because of, or on account of faith. Instead, we are said to be justified by faith or through faith.

So exactly then, what is the role of faith in our justification? Again, allow me to use an illustration I've used with you before that, I think, pictures the role of faith in this. Imagine that your car dies on an isolated desert road and you suddenly find yourself stranded. You don't have water with you and days go by. And as those days go by, the fluids in your body begin to evaporate and you begin the slow and painful process of dying of thirst. But in God's good providence, at some point, as that process unfolds, someone drives past and they find you. And they have provided for themselves for this desert journey and they have a container, a large container in their car of water.

But you have no container with which to receive their water. They're happy to give it to you, but you have no container. And so they rattle around in their car, they search here and there, and somewhere in the back of the trunk they find an old cup that they had left there. And they give you that cup and you take that cup and you drink all the water that you need. Now, the fact that you have a cup doesn't mean you deserve their water. It's merely the means by which you receive the gift of water from them. And in that illustration, they not only give you the water, but they give you the cup.

The same thing is exactly true of faith. It doesn't earn anything. You don't deserve salvation because you exercise faith. It's merely the means by which you receive the gift of a right standing before God. And just like in the illustration, according to Ephesians 2, God even gives you the cup, faith is a gift of God. So, faith receives justification by our knowledge of Him.

So, those four truths then are the foundation of the doctrine of justification, but how should we respond to those truths? Let me give you two points of application. First of all, perhaps you're here this morning and you're guilty before God. You feel that guilt; your conscience knows you're guilty. You know, in the wee hours of the morning, as you awaken, the weight of your sin bears on your soul, as you even allow yourself to think about the future and the reality that one day you will die and stand before God your Creator, you bear the weight of that reality, and you know that a righteous and just God can only say one thing, guilty, and you would do absolutely anything you could to erase that guilt and to gain a right standing before Him.

Listen, the good news of the Gospel is this, you don't have to do anything. In fact, there's nothing you can do because Jesus has already done it. The Servant has already accomplished it. If you will turn from your sin and you will confess Jesus as Lord, as we studied last week, by grace alone God will credit your sins to Christ and He will have treated Christ on the cross as if He had committed your sins, and then He will credit the righteous life of Jesus Christ to you and treat you as if you had lived that life forever. And because of Jesus' righteousness, that you now have, God is completely a just judge to say righteous. That's the invitation God extends to you today if you're not in Christ.

Listen, understand this, you can walk out of here still bearing the guilt of your sin, if that's what you want. If that's your choice, you can leave bearing the guilt of your sin. You will be, as Isaiah describes it later in his prophecy, you are like the restless sea, always churning. That's a picture of your soul and that will continue, or you can receive the gift that comes through the suffering Servant today.

If you're in Christ, and that's for most of us here, can I plead with you? Don't ever lose the wonder and amazement of your justification. Think about one sin you committed this last week, just one. That one sin has enough guilt with it that if it was the only sin you ever committed in your life you would face the eternal wrath and curse of God deservedly. But Christ, in His goodness, came and He lived as you should have lived and He died the death you should have died. And if you have truly repented and believed in Jesus, God has made a legal decision about your case. Because of His grace in Christ, God has declared you forever righteous. You stand in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. There is nothing you can do that will improve your legal standing. And there's nothing you can do that will undermine it. Because when God made His decision about you, He knew all of your sins, past, present, and future. And yet, because of Christ, He said righteous.

Tragically, there are some today who claim to know Christ and have used justification as an excuse for their sin. Well, I'm justified, so what does it matter, I can live however I want. Listen, if that's how you think about justification, you're almost certainly not a Christian at all. On the other hand, there are many true Christians who take their sin very seriously, who have failed to live in the joy and freedom of their justification. They think God's like the judge in the

Herman cartoon who says to the defendant, “I find you not guilty, but I’m going to give you a couple of years just to be on the safe side.” That’s not God.

Romans 8:1 says, “There is therefore now no condemnation.” Condemnation is the opposite of justification. It’s finding someone guilty and giving them the penalty that guilt deserves. There is no guilty verdict, there is no penalty, for the one who is in Christ Jesus. In Romans 8 Paul concludes the judicial aspect of his argument with these words, “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies.” Listen, if God says you’re righteous, who’s going to say you’re not? “Who is the one who condemns? Jesus Christ is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.” Listen, who’s going to condemn you, who’s going to say guilty, when Jesus Christ who bore your guilt appears in heaven on your behalf?

Christian, live in the joy of what God has done for you in justification. Let it bring to your heart a lasting sense of assurance, you are in Christ, you are righteous, every one of your sins has been paid for, ultimately, finally, eternally by Jesus Christ. And let this truth serve as the motive for your pursuing holiness in your life because of what God has done for you in Christ. Beloved, hold fast to the truth that we have been justified. Let’s pray together.

Father, I really do feel so inadequate to explain these truths to Your people. I pray that Your Spirit would do what I cannot do, that He would take this truth, this profound truth simply explained, and He would bring it to bear on the hearts of Your people. Lord, that they would really come to grips with what this means and the implications of it, that for those who have never truly understood this truth but are in Christ, that this would be a revolutionary day in their Christian life and experience, as it was for me when I first came to understand this truth. Fill them with joy, fill them with confidence that they’re in Christ, they wear His righteousness. And Father, may it drive them to pursue likeness to Christ, to speak with joy of what He’s done, to others.

And Father, I pray for those here this morning who have not been justified, who are still guilty before You and who will hear a verdict of guilty if they were to die today and stand before You. Father, may this be the day when they turn from their sin and rebellion to embrace the suffering Servant, the Righteous One, who will gladly bear their sins, who did bear their sins, if they will turn from their sin and rebellion to You. May this be the day of their salvation. We pray in Jesus’ name, amen.