

Salvation: Justification

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Preacher: Kyle Webb

[0 : 00] It's good to be with you tonight. It's always a joy and a privilege and an honor to be able to share His Word no matter what circumstance, no matter where we are in our lives.

It's good to come here. I had a pretty rough day today. Just being honest with you guys, it's just kind of one of those rough days. A lot of stuff happened at work and I work in the IT field, so when stuff goes wrong, I'm responsible for that and we have to get that stuff working again. It was pretty tough. So let's go to the Lord and pray real quick so we can just praise Him for tonight and the fellowship that we get to experience together in His Word and in worship.

Heavenly Father, we thank You so much for giving us the opportunity here tonight to hear Your Word, but not only just to be hearers, but also be doers.

So Father, I pray that You would make Your Word alive in our hearts tonight. Father, that it would transform us. It would transform our understanding of You. It would transform our understanding of the cross and of this topic that's so important for us to understand in our faith.

[1 : 09] So Father, I pray that You would use this time tonight, that You would utilize this time tonight for Your glory. And Father, we would see the ultimate reality of our salvation in You. It's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.

If you have a Bible tonight, and I hope you do, I invite you to open with me to Galatians chapter 2. Galatians chapter 2. And we have a great Word to study tonight.

I know that it's great because every passage that we study in God's Word is great, isn't it? I love God's Word. It's just great to be able to study it. But tonight, I'm praying that this chapter will just come alive in this room.

And it will come alive in our hearts. And that it would transform our lives and transform our understanding of the cross. And our understanding of our salvation. And ultimately, our view of our topic tonight, which is, as Nathan already mentioned, justification.

It's very important that we understand that. And I want to be clear tonight that we're not just teaching topics here. I'm going to be primarily teaching from a singular passage, which is known as expository preaching, even though it seems like we might be teaching topically here on Thursday nights.

[2 : 21] And it's true that we have an idea of where we're going. We teach from God's Word. We don't teach from a topic. And I think it's important for us to grasp that because we find our truth in God's Word, not from man-centered ideas.

And that's why we, as a church, have made a commitment to teaching expository messages on Sunday mornings. And we teach expository on Thursday nights in our Bible studies because we get our truth from God's Word, not from an idea where we pull an idea out of our heads and then we try to apply Scripture to it.

That's the wrong way to handle God's Word. We get our ideology and our ideas because we believe that God has given us a Word that is sufficient. And we believe that God's given us everything in Scripture that pertains to life and godliness.

And therefore, we get our truth. We derive our truth from Scripture and not from man-centered ideas. This text tonight speaks strongly toward justification. And Paul, as you know, is writing to a church of Galatia or the people of God in Galatia.

And what we have here in this chapter, we're going to go through the whole chapter. What we have here is two episodes, essentially two episodes, and then we have an explanation at the end. So that's how we're going to divide the text tonight in three different ways.

[3 : 32] So let's dive into the first episode, Galatians 2, verse 1. Then after fourteen years, I went up against Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up because of a revelation

and set before them, though privately before those who seemed influential, the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running or had not run in vain.

But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ, so that they might bring us into slavery, to them we did not yield in submission, even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

Verse 6. Verse 6.

And when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

Only they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing that I was eager to do. Galatians 2, verses 1 through 10, this first episode, the first section that we're kind of looking at tonight, is a picture of legalism.

[5 : 22] It's a picture of legalism. If you're a note taker, this is what I want you to do, is warm up your pens and get ready for some definitions tonight. Legalism is a situation where there is a right behavior with a wrong belief.

Legalism is a situation where there is a right behavior with a wrong belief. I'm going to explain that in just a moment. But here's what's going on. The problem in the church is that they have these Judaizers who are coming in and saying that you have to do certain things, you've got to perform certain laws or certain rituals in order to receive grace from God.

And so you have these people who are trying to explain these things, and namely what we're talking about here is circumcision. They're saying in order for you to receive grace, it's only available to you if you are circumcised.

This is what these Judaizers are saying. They're saying you have to follow the law of the Old Testament, the old law. And this is where Paul talks about how Titus, who he himself, a Gentile, wasn't compelled to participate, wasn't compelled to be circumcised.

And this was huge. This was incredibly huge because if Titus had been compelled to be circumcised, then it would have been an affront to the gospel of grace that Paul was teaching.

[6 : 40] Because it would have made the gospel conditional. It would be conditional upon whether or not you were circumcised.

And you would have had to have been circumcised in order to receive this gospel. Or you have to do certain things to receive this gospel. And so here we have legalism at its finest.

That's what's going on in this first section of Scripture, the first section of Galatians 2. And legalism at its heart is working on our own rules and in our own power.

And ultimately legalism is working to earn God's favor. You follow a set of rules. You perform these certain sacraments. You do things right. And then you earn favor with God.

That is what legalism is. I'll give you an example just real quickly of my own life. When I was growing up, I had a brother that was six years older than me. And I looked up to him.

[7 : 38] Anybody a younger sibling? We have quite a few younger siblings here. Man, I looked up to my older brother like he was... I mean, I just wanted to be just like him. And so one day we were...

After school, we were at home alone before mom and dad got home from work. And that's when we usually got into trouble. You know, that's when we usually did things that we weren't supposed to be doing. So we went outside. We were bored. We went outside one day.

And we started to pick up the little stone pebbles that are in the landscaping... Like the landscaping pebbles that are, you know, in our bushes and stuff. And we started to pick those up and just start chunking them over the house.

Don't ask me why. It's completely pointless. But we were having a good time. And so we were picking up these pebbles. We got a handful of them. And he starts throwing them. So I'm the little brother following along with what he's doing. And I started picking up pebbles and chunking them over the house.

Well, it didn't take real long. I didn't take too many stones before me as an uncoordinated six-year-old. I take a pebble and I start to chunk it.

[8 : 37] And I just... Straight into a glass storm door. And this thing didn't just crack. This thing started in one little bitty section.

And you could see it as if it was in slow motion. From that one section, millions of cracks started to spread out from there. And glass started to rain down from this thing.

And I'm looking at this thinking, I'm in trouble. I'm in big trouble now. Because me and my brother did a lot of stuff that we could kind of cover over. We used a lot of paint in our lifetime to cover up marks on the wall and things like that.

Where we scuffed up the walls or we were doing something we shouldn't be doing and we could cover over. This was not something that I could cover up. And so I knew that I was in trouble. And so I went in my room and I just started bawling.

The six-year-old, you know, you're just like crying because you know you're in trouble. I said, Craig, you've got to call Mom and my brother. His name's Craig. You've got to call Mom and let her know because she's going to come home and find it anyway. So we've got to get out of this somehow.

[9 : 46] And there's no getting out of it, of course. The consequence, by the way, is really what we're heading toward for the story. But the consequence was, it must have been around fall time because there must have been leaves in the yard.

And my dad came home and was like, okay, we've got to figure out a consequence for that. So you guys need to get out in the yard and rake some leaves. So we rake leaves. Not just that day. We raked leaves all fall. Anytime there was a leaf in the yard, dad was like, remember the storm door? Get out in the yard and start raking. The next year came around. Leaves started falling again.

Remember the storm door? It's time to get outside. Third year, fourth year, fifth year.

I'm not even kidding. It was like we kept being reminded of this thing where we had to do. We had to go out and rake and rake and rake. And we never, I mean, I'm surprised my dad doesn't still bring it up.

For how many years he kept bringing that up. But in my six-year-old mind to 13-year-old, however long it lasted that we had to go rake yard, I felt or I thought that I had to go rake leaves to earn my father's love.

[11 : 01] That's what I thought. But the reality was that my dad's love was there for me all along the way. And I know this being on the other side of fatherhood, of being a father myself.

If Joseph were to do something, yes, he would have consequences. I don't know if he's going to have five years worth of leaf raking, but he would have consequences. But my love would still remain for him.

I know that on this side of fatherhood. And I know, looking back, that my dad loved me all along the way. Now, think about our definition of legalism. Right behavior with wrong belief.

Was it wrong for me to rake leaves? No. It's absolutely not wrong for me to rake leaves. It was a good thing to serve my family. I was being obedient to my father. I was facing the consequences of the poor decision that I made.

But was it wrong for me to think that I needed to rake leaves to receive my father's love? Yes. And that's what these Judaizers were saying needed to be done, to be circumcised, to follow Jewish laws.

[12 : 06] Needed to be done in order to receive the father's love, in order to be accepted for the father. Were following Jewish laws or being circumcised in and of themselves wrong?

No, absolutely not. Circumcision was a huge part of God's story. It's a huge part of the history of God. It's a huge part of the old covenant. There was absolutely nothing wrong with circumcision. I want you to hear that loud and clear tonight. There was nothing wrong with following the old law. But when it became a bad thing is when it was accompanied by the belief that they needed to do these things in order to earn favor with God.

Or in order to earn acceptance with God. It's right behavior with wrong belief. Now translate that a couple thousand years later into our context.

We're not talking about circumcision. We're not talking about Jewish law. Most of us aren't really stumbling over that issue right now. But what are the good things we do? What are the really great things that we do in our Christian lives?

[13 : 11] Maybe a quiet time. Or maybe it's showing up here on Thursday night for Bible study. You check that off on your list of things that you do good for the week. You're serving people. Or maybe it's a prayer meeting on Friday morning.

So you come to you. Good things. These are excellent behaviors to which we place, we pour our lives into. And there's nothing wrong with doing these things. But where we run into wrong is as

soon as they're accompanied by the belief that doing those things finds us more favor with God. We've missed the point. Right behavior with wrong belief. I know some of you right now are thinking, man, what does this have anything to do with justification? It has everything to do with justification. I hope you can track with me as we continue on through God's Word.

So we're going to look at the second picture, Galatians 2, 11. Galatians 2, we'll start in verse 11 for the second picture here. When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he was clearly in the wrong.

Before certain men came from James. And he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.

[14 : 23] And so what we have going on here right now is we have two different groups. It's two different segments. You can almost even think about it, if we want to bring it into our context, you can think of it as Reformed believers and non-Reformed believers. You have two different camps and they're believing two different things.

And so you have people who believe that circumcision was necessary. Then you have those who are Gentiles who don't believe that circumcision was necessary. And these groups are in conflict with one another.

Believers in conflict with other believers and their beliefs. And so what he's saying here is that Peter's beginning to draw back from the Gentiles because he's afraid of what the people who are circumcised, the Jews, with their thinking of him.

All along the way. Verse 13. So the first part of Galatians chapter 2 is a picture of legalism.

The second part of Genesis chapter 2 is a picture of hypocrisy. It's a picture of hypocrisy. For you note-takers, hypocrisy is right belief with wrong behavior.

[15 : 44] Hypocrisy is right belief with wrong behavior. Let me explain what just happened in Genesis 2, 11 through 14. It's kind of hard to follow this. And I believe this is one of those sections of Scripture that's hard to follow because of translation.

It's not just because, you know, it just seems kind of wordy. And I think that that's how it had to be translated. But this is one of the most dramatic, most intense episodes in all of church history.

And certainly in the New Testament. Because what you have here is the Apostle Paul is publicly confronting the Apostle Peter. Two big shots in apostolic history, okay?

These two big shots in early history. They are apostles, which means that they're above just a regular disciple. They are these first major teachers.

And you have Apostle Paul going up against the man who essentially taught the first Christian sermon. And he was kind of, you can kind of think of Peter kind of like the leader of the apostles in a sense.

[16 : 48] And Paul's going up against him in front of these people. And this was an intense moment. And there's background here that has to be explained.

It mostly centers around Acts chapter 10 where Peter receives a vision from God that essentially tells him that the gospel is not just open to the Gentiles.

That salvation is not just open, I'm sorry, to the Jews. It's not just open to the Jews. But now it's open to a whole range of people that we call the Gentiles. The people who aren't Jews. What was once available only to a small segment of the population is open up to a whole world of people. Now this is really important for us in here tonight. Because most of us who are in here tonight will fall under the category of Gentile. Most of us are not Jewish by heritage. So this is a great truth for us.

Because we are now part of the new covenant. We are allowed to be part of the new covenant in Christ Jesus. And Peter was there. Peter knew the gospel.

[17 : 51] He believed the gospel. And he knew. We know from Acts chapter 10. He knew that the gospel was open to Gentiles. He knew that. But Peter's life wasn't reflecting the gospel.

He knew that all men were accepted before God. Regardless of whether they were circumcised or not circumcised. But he wasn't practicing that in his life. Now again, we can't just keep this in the context of 2,000 years ago.

We've got to bring this back into our context today. We don't normally get hung up over circumcision. But are there inconsistencies in your life? Are there inconsistencies in your life that don't line up with the gospel that we believe in?

If we believed in a Savior that came to preach good news to the poor and to the powerless, yet our lives aren't entirely abandoned to teaching that and taking that message to the world, then our lives are out of line with the gospel.

We're out of step with the gospel. They don't match up with the gospel. And there's inconsistency there. And I don't really think we have to give many examples tonight, because each and every one of us struggle in some way differently.

[19 : 06] We all have different struggles. We all have different inconsistencies that don't line up with the gospel. I struggle with stuff. You struggle with stuff. I might struggle with different things than you struggle with.

But let us suffice to say that if your life doesn't look radically different than the rest of the world, then you're probably not living for the gospel, for the sake of the gospel.

There's probably inconsistencies in your life. And these things are often evident, by the way, in the way that we spend our time, in the way that we spend our money, the way that we spend our thoughts as we think about things, even down to the way that we dress sometimes.

There can be inconsistencies. And so what we have to do, as a people of God, is avoid both of these errors. We have to avoid legalism, thinking that we have the behaviors right, and everything's okay.

We have to avoid, on the other hand, talking and believing in this gospel of grace, and then living our lives just like the rest of the world. So how do we bring these two things together?

[20 : 13] How do we fuse right beliefs with right behavior? How do we pull these two things together? And the answer, it's going to be a Sunday school answer, and you've got to bear with me on this one, the answer is faith.

The answer is faith. And this is where justification comes into play. This idea of faith and justification fuse these two ideas together. So let's continue in Galatians chapter 2 and verse 15.

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, yet we know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ, so that we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

But if in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ a servant of sin? Certainly not. For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. Verse 20. I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

[21 : 30] And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God.

For if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. You see the two key words mentioned throughout this section of Scripture? The two key words there are justified in faith. Justified in faith. And over and over and over again, you'll notice that justification, not just in this passage, but all over the New Testament, that justification is one of the amazing results of faith in Jesus Christ.

We know that man is not justified by observing the law, so we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ, not by observing the law, because by observing the law, no one will be justified.

So what Paul is saying here is that we are justified by our faith. But what is justification? It's translated all throughout the New Testament as justified, just, justify, justification, righteousness, right, or righteous.

[22 : 48] All those words can essentially be interchanged in New Testament terminology. And it's one of the most important concepts that any follower of Christ can really grasp.

And so this is an incredibly important concept for us to understand tonight. If we walk away from here not understanding justification, then this is going to be a travesty. We have to understand what this justification means for us tonight.

Luther said, The doctrine of justification by faith alone is the doctrine upon which the church stands or dies. Sorry, or falls. John Calvin said, It's the hinge upon which everything turns.

So it's at the heart of the Reformation, and it's at the heart of New Testament Christianity. Luther said in another place, he said, The justification is the truth of the gospel. It's the principal article of all Christian doctrine, wherein the knowledge of all godliness consists.

Most necessary it is, therefore, that we should know this article well, teach it unto others, and beat it into their heads continually. I like that, don't you? We're just to beat this concept of justification into each other's heads.

[24 : 04] Man, you trip up, you stumble, you fall. Yeah, you go to your brother and your sister in Christ. You confront them with their sin, but then you beat justification into their heads. Because the reality is that we are justified.

We are justified. So we clearly see this is a very important concept, and it's certainly important for us to get this right. And we get this clear and precise in our understanding.

I've heard people attempt to explain it in this way, and it's not that this is a wrong way to explain justification necessarily, it's just that it's an incomplete way to explain justification.

But you may have heard this before, have you ever heard anybody say, justification means it's just as if I'd never sinned. And I think the problem with that is that in trying to find a cute way of explaining something so that we can remember it, we kind of don't encompass the whole of justification.

So it's just as if I'd never sinned. But here's the problem. You have sinned. And the consequences for sin is death, according to Scripture. All over Scripture, the consequences for sin is death.

[25 : 14] So there's a consequence, and sin deserves the wrath of God. And God, who is just and holy, a God who is just and holy, can't just sweep sin under a rug and forget about it.

There's a consequence that must be paid, and somebody, someone, has to pay that consequence. And so the best way to understand justification is to understand just a good, solid definition of justification.

So that's what we're going to do. We're going to walk through this word by word, because each word in this definition is incredibly important. Note takers, here you go. You're geared up, ready to go. Justification is the gracious act of God.

So we're going to start there. Justification is the gracious act of God. It's something that God does by His grace. In verse 16, at the very end of the verse, he says, Not by observing the law, because by observing the law, no one will be justified.

It's the same picture in Romans chapter 3, where Paul also says, There is no one who does good, not even one. There's nothing that anyone in all the earth can do to initiate God's justification.

[26 : 32] God does it by His own grace, by His own will, His own grace. It's entirely from Him and by His grace. Justification is the gracious act of God by which God declares.

By which God declares. The key word there is declares. Justification is a declaration. And the word picture that we have with this word justification is kind of in a courtroom setting.

You think of a judge and how he declares judgment upon someone. How he declares whether you're guilty or not guilty. He passes judgment. And that's the picture, the word picture that we get is a holy judge who passes judgment, makes a declaration.

And that's the language that's being used here in justification. It's not a process. It is an act. It happens at one point in time. And this is huge for us to understand this.

It's huge for us to understand that this is something that happens as an act in one point in time because we can't be more justified tomorrow than we are today. And we can't be more justified a year from now than we are today.

[27 : 46] Because justification happens. It's an act. It's not a process. Romans 5.1, Paul says, Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God.

When we have been justified, I want to just clarify that if you're a born-again believer in this room, you've been justified. I don't want to make the assumption that everybody in here is a born-again believer, that everyone's redeemed, because that may not be the case.

But God has made a once and for all declaration over you as a believer in Christ Jesus. Now that declaration involves next in the definition, a sinner.

This is how it reads, Justification is the gracious act of God by which God declares a sinner. This is the picture of justification.

It is God as the judge dealing with man, the sinner, guilty before a holy God. And this is so big for Paul to be teaching this doctrine.

[28 : 50] Why? Why is it so big that Paul is teaching this doctrine? Because talk about a guy who, before meeting Christ, was trying to follow the rules to a T. See, he attributed righteousness to himself by trying to follow the law of God.

Yeah, he was persecuting the Christian church. That was very true. He was persecuting the church, but why was he persecuting the church? Because he believed that they were an affront to the Old Testament law.

He believed that they were false teachers at the time. But they were certainly not false teachers. So he was attempting to be the best person that he could be. And when he met Christ, he was confronted not only with his inadequacy because of his own sin, he was also confronted with his inadequacy to be able to do anything good or anything righteous that would live up to the standard of Christ.

Because there's nothing that he can do. The best things that we bring to the table before God are wickedness. They're as filthy rags, according to the Old Testament.

Nothing that we can bring to God is good enough. And so here's the picture. What you have is a guilty man standing before the Holy Judge of the universe, and in justification, you have a gracious act of God by which God declares a sinner righteous.

[30 : 11] That's the whole definition. Gracious act of God by which God declares a sinner righteousness. That, ladies and gentlemen, is an amazing, amazing truth.

That is an amazing truth. That the Holy God of the universe, the Holy Judge over all the earth, would look at you and at me as we're standing there in direct defiance and direct obedience to Him, an affront to the gospel itself, as we live in our sin, that a holy God and a holy judge would look down on me and you, and He would say, not guilty.

Not guilty. Not guilty. Righteous. Accepted. Peace before me. It doesn't make sense to us in our minds.

How can that happen? Solely on the basis of faith in Christ Jesus. That's how it happens. That's the only way. How can a sinner be declared righteous in God's sight?

I can tell you, the process was not an easy process. It required a perfect human sacrifice, and it required God to sacrifice His Son, and not just sacrifice Him, but sacrifice Him in one of the most gruesome kind of deaths that a human can experience.

[31 : 41] But not only that, and I may be getting ahead of myself here a little bit, but not only did He die a gruesome death, but He took on the sin of the world into His body when He hung on the cross.

We're talking about a radical, gruesome, horrifying death. The answer to the question is that God has taken the righteousness of Christ, He has taken His righteousness, and He has credited it to the sinner's account.

This is 2 Corinthians 5. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us. And don't miss this. God took all that was in your account, all the unrighteousness, all the sinful acts, all the ugliness of sin, and the willful rebellion, and idolatry that was in your account, and He placed that onto His Son as He hung on the cross.

He didn't just sweep it under the rug and pretend like it's not there. See, Jesus, in His life, He never minimized sin. And God never minimizes sin.

In Luke chapter 7, we have an account where Jesus was eating with the Pharisees, as He often did. He would eat with sinners, he would eat with the Pharisees, he would eat with whoever invited Him over because He wanted to make an impact on the region, He wanted to make an impact on the culture, and so He often would eat with people who didn't necessarily agree with Him.

[33 : 07] So He was eating with the Pharisees, and word gets out around town that Jesus is in this, home, and Simon the Pharisee, in his house, he was eating with them, and word spreading all over town, and it gets to this one woman.

This woman was, according to Scripture, a known sinner, possibly a prostitute. But nonetheless, we know that she was a known sinner in the town. You know, most of us, we like to kind of keep our sins private, don't we?

This woman was not keeping our sins private. She was a known sinner. And word gets to her that Jesus is eating with the Pharisees, and I don't know how all it spreads and how it went.

I'm sure that Jesus was starting to make a stir in the land, and so people were talking about Him wherever He goes, and so this woman, she hears somebody say, Jesus, He's over here. He's in this house.

I saw Him walk in there with the Pharisees. She says, Jesus, He's eating over here in this house? Yeah, I saw Him walk in.

[34 : 06] And Simon, the Pharisee, went in his house. He went in there, and a couple other Pharisees went in there, and Jesus went in. And this woman, a known sinner, I don't know what

makes someone do this, but she was determined to get in there.

She was determined to go in and to speak to Jesus. I don't know what makes a sinner do that, but she was determined. So she, slips in the back door, knocks out the cook.

I mean, I don't know how you get into these places. You know, there weren't big homes like we have today, so she somehow slips in, gets to the area where they're eating. It says they're reclining at the table, which usually meant that they all had their heads in and tore the table together, and they reclined.

It was a custom that they did back then. They didn't really necessarily always sit in chairs like we do today. So they're reclining there, and she makes her way around to Jesus. Remember, a known sinner, and she begins to weep.

She begins to weep, and as her tears are falling off of her face, they're dripping onto the feet of the Son of God. And as those tears dripping, accumulate, she takes her hair and begins to scrub his feet and to wash his feet with her tears.

[35 : 30] she brought in a container with oil. She anointed his feet with oil, perfume. Pharisees had a heyday with that.

Pharisees who were eating with him had a just, you know, if he was the Son of God, he would surely know that this woman, they thought they had Jesus trapped, he would surely know this woman was a known sinner in this town.

If he was the Son of God like he says he is, he would surely know that. And knowing their thoughts, you gotta know Jesus knew what they were saying, he knew what they were thinking in their minds. He turns to them, he says, can I tell you a story?

Two men owed money. One owed a lot. And one owed just a little. Both of their debts were forgiven. Who do you think was more grateful, the one who owed a lot or the one who owed a little? They said, well, the one who owed a lot. He said, yep, she owes a lot. She sinned in a public, horrible way.

[36 : 45] And her debt is big. She owes a lot. See, it's important to note that Jesus doesn't minimize the sin here. He doesn't minimize the sin.

He says that her debt is big. And he looks at the woman and he says, your sins are forgiven. Your sins are forgiven.

Your faith has saved you. Go in peace. And even though her sins were never minimized, she found peace with God that day through his son. And you'll notice that it happened in a declaration.

Jesus declaring her sins forgiven. It's the picture of justification. And it works the same way for us when we give our lives over to Christ and righteousness is imputed to us.

We are declared righteous. We are accepted before God. And this is why Paul adamantly opposes Peter in this circumstance and anyone else who undercuts the gospel by trying to add works by necessity for salvation.

[37 : 54] Because God has already done the work for us. Christ's work on the cross was sufficient for us. We no longer have to work for our salvation.

And I hope you see why the doctrine of justification is such a beautiful thing in the life of the believer. That through faith in Christ we are accepted before God. And you can see why people during the Reformation were saying man that just sounds like it's just too easy.

Because they had been living the life of works before their doctrine stated that they had to do works. They had to do good things to credit to their account to credit toward their righteousness.

And the church at that time had made people believe this by manipulating people.

And so Martin Luther comes along and Calvin comes along and all these reformers come along and they say no that's not the way it works. You get to receive justification. It's an act.

It's something that God declares us righteous because of our faith. And they're saying no that's just too easy. You just trust and that's it.

[38 : 59] And it's the same question that these Judaizers were asking in Galatians chapter 2. Aren't you undercutting the obedience to the law? And Paul says no. Through faith in Christ we're accepted before God.

Number one. Number two. Through faith in Christ. And this is where it gets really really really good for the life of the believer. Through faith in Christ we are alive to God.

So not only are we accepted before God because of justification. We are alive because of our faith in Christ. We are alive to God. And being alive to God means that our life has been transformed by

Christ.

And what the work that he has done in our hearts and in our lives. And in verse 18 Paul says if I rebuild what I destroyed I prove that I am a lawbreaker for through the law I died to the law so that I might live.

So that I might live for God. Died to the law so that I might live for God. Paul is saying that because of our faith that we are accepted before God.

[40 : 03] But faith is also the only way that we can live to God. It's the only way to experience true life in God. You see Paul is leaving no room here for a one time decision that you walk down the aisle, maybe you prayed a prayer and you lived your life just like everybody else.

There's no room for that in Paul's theology. There's no room for that in Paul's doctrine. It's not possible because if we are saved by faith and we also live by faith, our works are a result of our faith in other words.

And then Paul gives us a loaded verse in verse 20 and I encourage you if you've not already hidden this scripture in your heart, if you've not already hidden this word in your heart, that you hide it in your heart this week.

It says, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me. What an amazing verse. I've been crucified with Christ. What does that mean? What does it mean to be crucified with Christ? Does that mean that Paul was there with Jesus hanging on the cross with him?

[41 : 16] No, he wasn't physically there with him. But it means that we are dead and we're alive. That makes sense. We're dead, but let me explain.

We are dead to our sin. We are dead to sin and alive to Christ. And this is why justification is so important for us to understand because justification is different than forgiveness.

Justification, they're related, but justification is different than forgiveness. And this, that when you commit something wrong, you have to ask for forgiveness, and then you go out and commit another wrong, you have to come back and ask for forgiveness again.

Forgiveness is kind of a one-time thing. Justification is all-encompassing. In justification, you're justified. You're declared not guilty. You do something wrong, God's still looking at you saying, not guilty, accepted, peace with me.

There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for the law of the spirit of life has set you free from the law of the spirit of death. And over and over and over and over again, in the New Testament, you see this justification.

[42 : 34] You see not guilty. You see accepted before God. Accepted before God. Not guilty. Do we believe that in our lives tonight? I mean, do we really believe that?

That we're accepted before God? God, some of us, we might just need to just let that soak in to our hearts right now. You, despite your sin, despite all the things that you've done in your life, you're found acceptable before God.

That you are accepted by the God of the universe, a perfect and holy God. God, I think sometimes we struggle to fully believe this and fully realize this in our lives.

We like to hang on to our guilt, don't we? We like to hang on to that shame that we experience. And so often we think of our lives like this cosmic lifelong game of Simon Says, where if we don't do what God says, then we're out for the count.

We have to sit out for a while until we can feel righteous again. And we have to sit out until we're made right before God again. And that's not what the doctrine of justification teaches us.

[43 : 59] We've been bought with a price and we have already been forgiven. I used to use this illustration where I used a cinder block. Is Wes still in here? Wes, you might remember this illustration because you're the first person I used as an example.

I don't know if you remember that or not. But I used to use an illustration with a cinder block and I was all excited about using this illustration. So I went into the hardware store and I went in and I was like, I told the guy when I walked in, he was like, how can I help you?

I said, you know, this is what I need. I need a cinder block. I need about 10 feet of the heaviest duty chain that you have. And I need a bolt cutter. And the guy looked at me really strange and he was like, almost like with a worried look.

He's like, I need to ask you something. You're not planning on sinking somebody in a lake, are you? And I could look back on that and see this does look a little bit suspicious.

You could chain somebody to a cinder block and sink them alive if you wanted to, I guess. But no, I wasn't. I was trying to use a sermon illustration so it was kind of cool because I got to explain that to a guy who was probably lost in a hardware store.

[45 : 06] But the illustration was this. Before Christ, we were bound up in our sin. That's what the chains resemble. You're chained to this weight and this guilt that you carry around before Christ.

You're chained to it. And the picture there was after Christ. And what I had, I actually had Wes, because he was in the student ministry where I was teaching this. Do you remember this, Wes? You don't remember this at all?

Amazing. It had no impact on the students who were there. That's good to know. All right, so anyways, you take the cinder block and you put it on to Wes.

And he basically at the very beginning or toward the beginning of the sermon, through the whole sermon, you had him sitting up there. You remember it now? Because you remember you didn't just stand there the whole time.

He sat down on the cinder block because that's the best that you can do. You can't stand up there the whole sermon. And so in the sermon, the reality is that Jesus, because of the work that he did on the cross, you are broken free from that guilt and that shame, from that sin, the reality of sin.

[46 : 06] You're broken free from that. You no longer have to be chained to it. You're no longer bound up in that sin that you are before you're a believer in Christ Jesus. And so that was the visual picture there, that you no longer have to carry the weight and the guilt of sins.

That's where the bolt cutters came in. And as I recall, I was very careful to avoid your Achilles as you sat there and pinching that thing down. But the reality of the whole thing is, the reality is that we are free from that sin.

And ultimately, we can pick it up and we can carry it. I brought something over here. The best thing I could find. I had a cinder block in my crawl space underneath my house, but it was dirty and it wasn't real good.

You can pick up the weight and you can carry it around with you. Potentially for your whole life. You can carry around this weight of guilt and shame.

And it's going to be really hard because it's hard to walk into a building like we're in right now and to be amongst other believers and to worship God, holding the weight of the guilt and the shame that you carry around in your life.

[47 : 21] And you find it hard to share with unbelievers. Because you're sharing with them and you're saying, you know, and Jesus is the best way to life.

Ignore what I'm holding here. But Jesus is the best way to life. He's the best way to live. All the while you're holding this guilt and this shame. Don't truly believe in the justification that Christ, this Christ's work on the cross that justified you.

You go on a mission trip and you say, I don't know how I'm going to get this through the TSA, the metal detectors, the airport security, but I'm going.

I'm getting on an airplane. I'm going to have a lot of explain to do when I get to customs in China. But I'm going. I'm going on a mission trip and I'm carrying this with me. The reality is we don't have to carry this anymore.

If you want to pick it up, you can pick it up. But I'm here to tell you tonight that it was ended to the cross when Jesus died.

[48 : 31] And you can pick it up and carry it if you want to carry it. but it was nailed to the cross and you no longer are bound to the weight of guilt and shame in your life.

And let that speak truth over you right now. Because some of us came in here tonight laden with guilt and laden with shame. And maybe you came in here tonight thinking that you are out of the game for a little bit because you sinned earlier, maybe right before you came.

Maybe you sinned at some point this week and you know that you're carrying around that guilt and that shame and you brought it in here with you tonight. And I'm telling you, this doctrine of justification should be made real in our lives.

And whatever we brought in here, we no longer have to carry that with us because Jesus carried it in him on the cross. This is what God's word tells us in 1 Peter 2.4, that he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

For by his wounds you were healed. By his wounds, by the sacrifice of Christ, you were healed.
[49 : 51] And that's the picture of justification. And it's so important that when we approach the text of Scripture that we see, when we see these tough commands in Scripture, these commands that are sometimes hard for us to follow, that we don't walk away saying, if I do these things and I'm accepted before God, why?

Because that's legalism. We don't walk away ignoring these truths because that's hypocrisy. Instead, we walk away with our hearts running toward Christ saying, Jesus, you are everything that I need and I need more of you and more of you each and every second of my life. and I need you to show me the places in my life where my life doesn't line up with the gospel. Show me the places where I need to be more conformed into the image of your Son. I need more of you. And in doing so, we honor God with a life that's not just justified by works. It's justified by the grace of Christ that comes through faith, only through faith in Christ Jesus. And it's for this purpose that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone. Let's pray together. Amen.