

Justified

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 August 2012

Preacher: Debbie Gould

[0 : 00] Let me pray for us. Our Father and our Lord, we thank you that we can come and open your word. And we ask, Lord, that by your spirit you will speak to each and every one of us.

Father, might you show us things that we might already know, but might you illumine it and make it new and fresh for each of us. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Okay, well, Elsa Piper is an Australian writer. And she was intrigued by the concept of individuals being made right with God by walking the Pilgrim's Walk in Spain.

Walking 1,200 kilometres is all it takes. Every time you pass through a village, you get a stamp to say that you've walked through.

And when you get to the end, voila, your sins are forgiven. And you are classed as righteous before God.

[1 : 04] Now, this story intrigued me. It's a book that I heard about and read with great enthusiasm. Here is a woman who didn't know if there was a God.

Well, she wasn't certain what constitutes a sin, if in fact there were such things as sins. And if there were such things as sins, she wasn't absolutely sure that there was a God who was going to do something about removing those sins.

But nonetheless, Elsa blogged and she said on her blog that she was happy to carry the sins of other people and she would do the walk for them.

She'd walk the 1,200 kilometres. And in that, they would have their sins removed from them. Now, many people contacted her.

They confessed their sins to her. Some of them confessed. It was the very first time that they'd ever confessed their secret sins to another person. And so she promised that she would walk the pilgrim's walk.

[2 : 22] But interestingly enough, in the book, she never felt the need to confess her own sins. It was actually carrying other people's, which I found quite fascinating.

And so she decided to do that. But to do justice to the fact that she was carrying the sins of other people, she decided that what she would do is read the page of sins or pages of sins every day. Just in case there was a God, and if there was a God, that he would, in fact, deal with those sins and see that she was dealing with them in an appropriate way, and hence God would then forgive the people.

Now, the intended result would be owners would be released of the sins. And let me say, it's an exercise that is not new.

It has happened for many, many years with the Catholic Church, and it's called Buying Indulgences. Now, it's nothing new that people believe that they have to do something for God to see them as righteous, without sin, and therefore just as if they had never committed any sins at all.

[3 : 50] Am I knocking all the time? What is it exactly? My earring, maybe? So sorry, folks.

Just remind me I only have one earring on later. Now, as many of you know, you know, sort of over the years, I've loved talking to people about Jesus.

And it's easy sometimes to understand where a person is at in their relationship to Jesus by asking a couple of questions. Now, I'm not being judgmental of the people when I say this, but if I asked a hypothetical question of why would God let you into his heaven, then often the answer will be, I haven't murdered anybody.

I have kept the Ten Commandments. I'm a nice guy and I do good deeds. That would be the very, very common answer that people would give me. And so then they would think that they could actually enter into heaven.

But like the author walking the pilgrim's trail in Spain, and many others walking the trail, I might add, there was even, Vanda reminded me today, we've seen a movie of this same thing, walking the trail called The Way.

[5 : 19] A very fascinating movie for anybody who wants to see it. But there are many, many people who feel that doing good things, being a good person, a nice person, will earn their way to God.

That is nothing new. Now, when we look at Romans up to this point, Paul's focus has been on the power of the gospel for all people who are locked in their sin, and they are under sentence of God's wrath.

Sam preached about that a couple of weeks ago. And we learned that through the preaching of the gospel, God invites all people, Jew and Gentile alike, to believe in Christ and enter into this new relationship with him.

And chapters 5 and 8, where we get to 5 now, chapters 5 and 8 is where we see Paul tie it all together, righteousness by faith with a future hope.

That's sort of the umbrella between 5 to 8 in Romans. Now, in these 11 verses of chapter 5, our attention is turning not to only the blessings that come from those who are in Christ, but also these verses give us a picture of what it looks like to be one of Christ's people.

[6 : 46] Verse 1 tells us we have been justified through faith. The word here is a legal word, and it's meaning that our debt has been cleared.

So that when we respond to the gospel in faith, God declares us innocent, and our relationship with him begins straight away.

It's as if we had not sinned. Now, in Jewish theology, justification and its opposite, condemnation, they were verdicts that would be delivered, they believed, only on the day of judgment, not something that one could experience now.

Don't get me wrong, though. The day of judgment will actually occur. Romans tells us that very clearly. But being justified, Paul is saying, is both now and it's in the future.

And now but not yet, as we say. And Paul is asserting that God is justifying us. He has already pronounced his verdict over us in doing so.

[7 : 58] It neither can be rescinded, and it cannot be changed. True, we still need to face God and have our case disposed of on judgment day.

But we can face that day with utter confidence. Since God in Christ has already decided our case in our favor, justification releases us from any uncertainty or fear about that judgment.

We're justified through faith. That is a radical thought. Contemporary Judaism believed that a man was right with God based on the works of the law.

Just like the pilgrim walking in Spain, the thought was and continues to be that people instinctively think that salvation depends on human goodness and self-effort.

Look with me at Romans 3.20. Therefore, no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law. Rather, through the law, we become conscious of sin.

[9 : 17] Verses 23.24. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

28 says, For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. And of course, Ephesians 2.8. For it is by grace alone you have been saved through faith.

And this is not by works so that no one can boast. Now, don't you find scripture absolutely amazing? Because just in case you think that being saved has anything to do with about how faithful you are, how many people you might financially support, how kind you might be to everyone around you, how many ministries you might get involved in, be they here at church or elsewhere, being saved has nothing to do with anything that you have done or will do so that you can't boast. How God understands us so clearly that we innately would want to take some credit. But clearly we're told that it's not about us and that we can't boast.

I find scripture quite fascinating with things so clear as that, to know what we are like as people, that we would want to actually take that credit. But righteousness comes from God, depends on his grace.

[11 : 00] Arising from faith, not works, is a great surprise. And because God has declared those who have faith in him to be right with him, we therefore have peace.

Now, we all want peace. People want to be at peace with themselves and they want to rest in peace. World peace is called for, mainly in pageants, I feel, and in Miss Congeniality. Poems are written, songs are sung, and, you know, sort of, we know that that's what people call for. We pray for peace. Yet no ultimate peace is possible for those who are searching for it without coming to terms with God first.

Peace here has two aspects. First is the peace of God. And in a sense of security and serenity that wells up in our hearts when we appreciate the blessings that we enjoy in Christ.

We read in the verse in Philippians 4-7, and we often say it in church here at the end of our services, and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[12:29] But it's the second aspect that Paul is referring to in verse 1, which is peace with God. The position we find ourselves in because God has ceased to be hostile toward us and has reconciled us to himself.

Verse 10 says, For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life?

There existed a state of war between God and ourselves before any of us were made right before him.

That is, we were enemies of God. We distrusted God and we resented God. But now, for those who believe, there is a peace, but not a passive peace, a mere absence of conflict, but positive, harmonious, and loving relationships with God that he himself has initiated through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Ephesians 2.14 tells us that Christ himself is our peace. And because we can have peace with God, we can then enjoy the peace of God that passes all understanding.

[14:03] But the blessings of being justified with God continue beyond peace. We also have access to God through faith into his grace. This grace reminds us that God intervenes on our behalf of his rebellious creation out of his own free will and without obligation.

We not only get into relationship with God by grace, but we live out that relationship day by day by day by God's grace.

The daily provision that we enjoy comes not from our hard work, but from God, who has chosen in his grace to bless us.

So whatever good that we might accomplish each day comes because God has graciously worked through us.

We stand in grace, as our verse tells us. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

[15:16] We read that this hope will not disappoint us, meaning that we will not be disappointed or ashamed on the day of judgment. Our claim that God will rescue us from God's wrath will someday be vindicated.

God will do what he has promised to do. How can we be sure? Well, Paul gives us two basic reasons. One is that God's love for us in Christ and the second one is God's work for us in Christ. God does not hold back his love to us in any way whatsoever. He pours out his love into our hearts by his spirit and the Holy Spirit communicates God's love to us.

Verse 8 says, but God demonstrates his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The emphasis in this verse is on the fact that we were still sinners when Christ died for us.

You see, the wonder isn't that Christ should die for us, but that he should do so while we were powerless, while we were ungodly, while we were rebellious sinners, while we were enemies of God.

[16:45] He didn't die for his friends. He died for his enemies. He died for those who crucified him and he died for you and for me.

So we have a hope because of God's love for us, but also because of God's work for us in Christ. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him? For if when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life?

Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have received reconciliation. We are to rejoice in the hope of Jesus, but we're also to rejoice in our suffering.

In verse 3, it says, not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance produces character, character produces hope.

[18:04] And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.

Boy, oh boy, how many times have I wished that verses talking about suffering did not exist in the Bible.

At first glance, there seems to be a contradiction. We've seen that peace is given in Christ Jesus and now we see that suffering is expected and what's more, we're to rejoice in it.

Let me say straight up, these verses and the others in the Bible that talk about suffering are not saying that we must be happy with our suffering.

No, it's about a joy and a confidence in Jesus Christ and a knowing that God is sovereign in all things and is working out his purposes.

[19:10] Now, I have experienced a great deal of personal suffering, which I can't go into at this moment in time, but one day I will share my testimony, which is really our whole family's testimony.

And really, suffering still continues day by day in various ways. But I knew this week when I was preparing this that I needed to preach these words to myself over and over and over again before I had the right to stand up in front of you and to encourage you to persevere in any suffering that you might be going through.

I actually had to own these words and believe the truths of these words myself. Sufferings are not an end in themselves, for they nurture something inside of us.

They nurture a peace and a patience. As active people, we want to change things. And especially, we'd like to change the unpleasant circumstances.

So this patience and endurance does not come easy for any person. The word that Paul uses here comes from the world of the blacksmith, where it was used for hammering of the red-hot horseshoe or plough where they are shaping it and testing it on the anvil.

[20:52] This shaping and testing engenders hope that is the hope of the glory of God. Where do I go when I suffer?

I go to the cross of Jesus and hope that, and the hope that comes in knowing that I have a saviour who in verse 6 tells me he died for the ungodly.

That is you and me. It is God's unconditional love and his solution that I cling to. And when I go to the cross, it is God who is glorified because of Jesus.

To turn to Jesus and the cross is a choice of each and every one of us when we have suffering in our lives and also just in the everyday, day-to-day living.

But we're not alone. That verse tells us that we have the Holy Spirit who will guide us and direct us. Now, I don't know if you fully appreciate the work of the Holy Spirit, but let me assure you without the Holy Spirit in our lives, we would be totally on our own and unable to do any of this.

[22:09] And any time that we're in a place of suffering, we need to turn to the hope that is Jesus Christ, knowing that we are being moulded and shaped into the person that God intended us to be.

After one endures many difficulties, there's a strength of character that develops that was not present previously. Such testing, such tested character, in turn, generates hope.

And why does it produce hope? Because moral transformation is evidence. That change in us as people, it's evidence that one is really being changed by God.

And so, therefore, assures us that there is the hope of a future glory, that it's not an illusion, that we haven't made it up. Because we know that we cannot change ourselves by ourselves.

Friends, any time we're tempted to doubt God's love for us, we need to go back to the cross as we constantly say here at St. Paul's. If you struggle to believe that God loves you, think about this.

[23:26] If God loved you enough to give you his son to die for you when you were his enemy, surely he loves you enough to care for you now that you are his child.

Having given such a priceless gift as his son, he will most definitely give everything else that is consistent with his glory and what is good for you.

we've been given everything in Jesus. We are justified and the blessings come with being made righteous.

We have peace with God. We have access by faith to the very presence of God himself. We have a grace and a hope in a glorious future with the King of Kings.

friends, we can walk away from here tonight from this message with head knowledge of all that these verses have given us and still not appropriate it to our lives.

[24 : 45] Not apply what this actually means and not live it out. Do not be fooled into thinking that knowing with your head what the gospel is, is going to save you.

but engage your heart and with great thankfulness that brings you to your knees in humility knowing that all that the gospel gives, you do not deserve one iota of it and yet it is there for the taking.

Our passage today is a renewed invitation to take advantage of all the blessings all the privileges of being a child of the king.

Cling to Jesus as i will rejoice in the hope that is for all those who believe and you will know the joy and the peace that comes from only from the one who saves the one who counts you as righteous before a holy God.

Amen.