

Justified by Faith Alone

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Bible Text: Romans 4:21-25
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Well, while you're being seated, make sure your electronic devices are off and let's open our Bibles to Romans this morning, Romans 4, we'll look at verses 21 through 25. I'm entitling this "Justified by Faith Alone." Great doctrine of our heritage. Justified by faith alone.

Romans 4, beginning in verse 21. Paul writes to the church at Rome and says, "and being fully assured," this Abraham now he's referring to,

21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. 22 Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness. 23 Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, 24 but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

Now it's Easter Sunday morning and one of the things I want to say, first of all, is that Easter is not a message of just a new beginning. Liberal theologians and liberal pastors for generations now have been trying to tell us that it's not really essential that Jesus died and it's not really essential that he literally rose from the dead, that really the Easter message is just a, a new beginning for mankind, a new way to approach life, a new selfless way to carry out your life before your fellow man. But that's not what Easter is about. That's a liberal perversion of the truth of the Easter message, and Easter is not at its root meaning even a message of victory over death, hell and the grave, though that's certainly included and that is absolutely true. These are wonderful truths but at its foundation, Easter, the resurrection of Christ, is the full assurance of our justification before God, you could even say our justification by God on our behalf.

Now let's look at this three ways. We're talking about this text, uh, Romans, uh, 4:21 through 25 and justified by faith alone, let's notice three things. First of all, let's notice the glorious uniqueness of our justification. The glorious uniqueness. Now I say unique for two reasons, there's many but two reasons primarily and that is, it's unique because only God could have done this. No man would have ever come up with these truths. And secondly, it's unique because after all of these generations, still the great majority of even professing Christians miss the truth of justification by faith alone.

Now let me talk about what it is not. First of all, justification is not a change of heart, though that happens when you're justified, that happens when you're saved, but properly understood justification is not that your heart has changed. Secondly, it's not a change of character or conduct, though that's certainly true after you're converted, justification understood properly doesn't mean you've all of a sudden become a better person. Well, of course, if you're saved, you will be. Thirdly, justification is not imparted to you on the basis of church ritual or church sacrament, all right? None of those things are the Bible doctrine of justification.

Here's what justification is: it is God granting you a new status or a new standing before him, and justification is accounted to you, you gain that new righteous status the moment you believe on Jesus Christ. So it doesn't mean your conduct has changed, it doesn't mean you performed some ritual or rite with the priest or whether it be the ordinance of baptism or the Lord's Table, none of that. It doesn't mean that and it doesn't mean you're all of a sudden becoming a better person so you might be justified. Justification is the grant of God that you now stand in a new way before him as righteous in his eyes.

You know, sometimes we hear about a family doing that wonderful wonderful thing of adopting a precious child, and sometimes when you adopt a child, especially if that child is overseas, everything is settled and they actually have your name before you even see the child, and that's kinda like justification. It is established that we bear God's name now, we have the righteousness of his Son but we're yet to start growing in our sanctification. When that child comes home or to that family, then he'll begin to learn what the family's like and how he's to conduct himself as a part of that new family, and that's what happens when God justifies us. We become his, we wear his name, we have a new standing in righteousness and then from there, we live out and learn how to honor him as our holy Father.

In ancient courts, they had a tradition or a custom where a man would sit before the judges and, uh, the judges at the end of the trial would get up and they would have a, a white pebble or a black pebble, and they'd walk by an urn that's set in front of the accused and as those judges walked by, they would drop in a white one if they were declaring him not guilty, they would drop in a black pebble if they were declaring him guilty. Now listen, those pebbles didn't change the man at all but they formally declared his standing before the court. That's what God's justification is of us. He formally declares when we believe on Christ, "Now you stand not guilty before Me." That's the glorious uniqueness of this doctrine. No man could have made this up.

Look at verse 22 of our text. It says, "Therefore," referring back to when Abraham believed and had faith in God's promise, "Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness." It's the idea of imputation. It was put into your account that you are now a righteous one before this Triune holy God. So justification is God's official formal declaration that you, a sinner, are now standing as justified in his sight. It's a change of status. It's a change of standing before God.

Romans 4:5 reminds us, now notice this wording here, "But to the one who does not work," now notice that, hasn't done anything, doesn't perform anything, "but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly." Now here's, here's the point of the text: as far as what you've done or what you've changed, as far as any renovation you've done to yourself, it's had no effect. You still are ungodly in your natural state but in that state of ungodliness the doctrine of justification says you now stand before God as righteous. He's the God who justifies the ungodly by faith in Jesus Christ. It's a powerful truth, the uniqueness of this glorious doctrine.

So God can uphold his own righteousness and declare the ungodly just before him based on the work of his Son Jesus Christ on their behalf. So God is not somehow sinning against his own standard of justice, he laid the justice on his Son. Well, let's don't get ahead of ourselves. First of all, we're talking about the uniqueness, the glorious uniqueness of our own justification. Secondly, let's talk about the glorious adequacy of our Savior. The glorious adequacy. I think we got the wrong word up there, word's pretty good, though, all right?

Look at verse 25, "He who was delivered over because of our transgressions." The point is we can stand justified because when God delivered Christ over, he performed all that was necessary for us unjust ones to be declared just before God himself. What a powerful thing this is. Now our change of conduct can in no way merit or earn our justification but – listen, mark this – it's not your change of conduct that can merit your justification but – listen – your justification depends upon the conduct of another, Jesus Christ. He performs it for us and God is ready to bestow righteousness and the standing of justification on those today who do not deserve it. Oh, that's glorious and it's all because of the adequacy or the accomplishment of our Savior. His resurrection would have no saving power if he did not first die and receive our punishment for our sins, that is, he died in our place. He died as if he were a guilty sinner as, as the just condemnation of God came upon him.

Now just for a moment, let's remind ourselves of our natural standing before God and I do a lot of this when I preach and I would just on this Easter Sunday morning exhort young pastors, you must preach a weighty doctrine of sin and depravity if you want your people to love and joy in Christ in their salvation. I mean, by the way, we're not just a little bad and God didn't have to do a lot because we're pretty good but we all have done, well, we're not perfect so Jesus died and you just accept Jesus and it's all fixed. That's not the Bible doctrine.

Just a few things right quick. Romans 3:19 reminds us, "we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law," notice how many, "that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God."

Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned," every one, "and fall short of the glory of God." God says, "I made mankind, humankind as the pinnacle of creation. I even gave mankind My own image, My own image is marked on humankind. They were to live way high upon high and holy principles, but every single one of them," God says, "has functioned way

down here. They've fallen short of what I, God, their Creator, made them to be and made them to do."

Let's remind ourselves that God is holy. Now don't just sit there and listen to this preacher on Sunday morning. God is holy. The theologians like to arrange that in communicable and non-communicable attributes that God has communicable attributes, attributes that we share with him like, like love or like faithfulness. We know something of those things but when God has those attributes, they are infinitely greater than ours. And then there's incommunicable attributes of God. There's so many ways God is radically unlike us. He's eternal. He's spirit. He's omniscient. He's omnipresent. And on and on we could go. So he is this being that transcends. He's way above anything and everything we could grasp or comprehend. He is transcendent in holiness and his very being calls for us sinners to be crushed and punished. You see, God is infinitely greater than us in all the ways we share attributes with him, and he is infinitely different from us in so many ways we cannot comprehend and when you put all these together, that's the beauty of holiness.

Now there's some things God can't be. God can't be a sinner. God cannot be unjust and he demands righteousness of all of his creatures but tragically all of us woefully fall short of God's mandated righteousness. We miserably fail and we fail in every single way. Uh, right quick, Romans 3 and I'll just, uh, speed through this. Romans 3:9, "What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin." Now that's everybody. You're, you're under, under the lineage of Jews or Greeks and they're all sinners. Verse 10, "as it is written, 'There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they've become useless; there is no one who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, and with their tongues they keep deceiving,' 'The poison of asps,'" or, or a viper, "'is under their lips'; their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness'; 'their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not not known.' 'There's no fear of God before their eyes.'" That's sung this morning on, on Easter Sunday morning all over the world people sit in church and they're just going through a motion because there's nothing in their heart that trembles, that they face a holy God. Just like, "What's for lunch?" It's because we're sinners and we can't grasp the gravity of the things which we face. Verse 19, "we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God."

So here we are as sinners or transgressors and our text tells us in verse 25 of chapter 4, he was delivered over because of our transgressions. Two words "delivered over" have, is, is the same idea of when a criminal is delivered over to the judge, delivered over to pay the consequence for his conduct. Jesus was delivered over to pay for our transgressions. Here the heavenly Father hands his precious one, his one and only begotten Son over to torment in our place. The prophet Isaiah wrote of this so powerfully and beautifully. Isaiah 53:7, "Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth."

Let's remind ourselves that him being delivered over means that God is the initiator here. God the Father came up with this. I, I used the phrase it's an anthropomorphic phrase because we come up with things but in reality God doesn't ever come up with anything because he already knows everything. He's never not known everything so he didn't come up with it, it's already there. But it's God's idea that he would initiate a plan whereby his precious Son would die for the transgressors. Isaiah 53 again, verse 4, speaks of him being smitten of God. Smitten by Satan and the devil? No. No. God the Father did smite God the Son on the cross. God's the initiator.

Isaiah 53:10 speaking of God the Father again, he "was pleased To crush Him...If He would render Himself as a guilt offering." It doesn't mean God gets some sort of, uh, uh, vile excitement out of crushing his Son, it means the design for which he, God the Father, and he, God the Son, formulated this plan and then fulfilled this plan, the design for which they did it was so holy and so good they were pleased to put the plan in action to save the children.

God is the initiator. Secondly, of course, Christ is the participant. Who was delivered over? Romans 4:25, Christ was delivered over for our transgressions. Jesus is the participant. Listen to, um, uh, John 10:18, Jesus said, "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down," talking about his life, "on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down," that's his life, "and I have authority to take it up again." I am the one willingly participating in this atoning sacrificial work. And 1 Peter 2:24 reminds us, "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross." Oh, dear friend, this morning if Christ is not yours, if salvation is not secure in your heart, turn to him and say, "O Christ, O Christ, You did bear my sin and I accept You as my Savior." Oh, you must do that this Easter Sunday.

Jesus gave himself in our place. Jesus was executed by the Father taking our sin and the consequences of that sin. In payment for our sin, he died and there he lay on the cross and later in the tomb dead. Some liberals say, "Well, he really didn't die. He just was knocked out and he woke up later." That's not what the Bible says. The Bible says he died. Jesus was dead on the cross. He was dead in the tomb. But while he was dead, he was active because in his death and in his dying he was actively taking the just retribution of a holy God against us transgressors. Dead but active as our guilt offering.

Thirdly, we are the recipients. God the Father made this plan, he initiated this plan. God the Son performed, participated in this plan and we are the recipients. He did what he did for us. He was delivered over, the text says, for our transgressions because he had no transgressions. He had no sin. When Christ gave his life up on the cross, the Bible says darkness came over the earth for three hours and in that cold darkness and, by the way, Satan and demons had no part in any of this, this was holy work between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, in that cold darkness the Father delivered over the willing Son to pay for our sin. We have that beautiful illustration of the Passover lamb in the Old Testament where every head of the household would take as best he could a spotless lamb and he would take that spotless lamb down to the temple or down to the tabernacle and present it to the priest and the priest would slay that lamb and then they

would apply the blood. That was a picture of Christ as that lamb represented, was the representative, representative rather for the whole family, so Christ represented us there. Jesus died the spotless lamb for the whole family.

When those three hours were finished, the infinite holy Father and the infinite Son had accomplished eternal redemption for our eternal souls. Eternal punishment for all believers of all time was paid for everyone, everyone who will believe. This is why the angel spoke to Joseph, remember Joseph, he heard about Mary, his fiancée, was pregnant and Joseph didn't know what to do. He was going to put her away but the angel says this to Joseph, Matthew 1:20-21, "The child is conceived of the Holy Spirit and you will call his name Jesus," notice the certainty of this, "for He will save His people from their sins." He's coming to save his people and he'll accomplish it.

Well, there's a glorious uniqueness to our justification. There's the glorious accomplishment or adequacy of our Savior. Thirdly, let's notice the glorious security of our justification. Verse 25, the last half says, "and He was raised because of our justification." Again, Isaiah 53:10 says the he, Jesus, after he dies, he will see his offspring. You see, Jesus is doing something through this death, this burial, and this resurrection. He's purchasing a family. He's collecting the children. He's going to get those for whom he died and the Bible says the, the prophet Isaiah prophesies before him, "I guarantee you when this One suffers and died, He will see His offspring. He's gonna live again and save every one of them and keep every one of them forever." How are we secure? Because the mighty risen Christ keeps those he saves. Glory hallelujah, what a truth.

The resurrection means that Christ did indeed accomplish this eternal salvation for his children and they will love him and enjoy him forever because they are his offspring. You know, the only way to properly understand this text, Isaiah 53:10, is to view it from God's perspective. Again, God decreed that he would have for himself a people, a church, if you will, all believers, and that these people would love God and enjoy God forever, and God would love and enjoy these children forever, but there was this problem, the children were all sinners, the children were all transgressors and God's holy justice demanded the eternal punishment for all these unjustified children. Therefore the Father commissioned Christ, the only righteous Son he had, to justly remove the children's guilt, a commission that Christ gladly, gladly submitted to. So in Christ's suffering and in Christ's death the children's justification was perfectly accomplished and then God raised him from the dead as a banner of the accomplishment.

Couple of subpoints here. He lives continually to prove our justification is settled. Ah, you've seen it, I've seen it when a, a ball team takes the field. Every once in a while they're just really cocky and they'll take the banner of their school and they'll run around the field and they'll go out to the middle of the opponent's field, the centerpiece, where the opponent's logo is, and they'll put that stake in that ground as if, "We've conquered here." Sometimes it doesn't turn out too good but that's what they do, some of them. Well, they come out and do that, well, that's what, that's what justification is. Justification is, or Christ rising from the dead is rather, the banner that our justification is settled. It's flying.

It's saying it's done. It's over. A dead savior over which death had triumphed and held him captive and could not ascend before God to the heavenly mercy seat and apply his royal, red, redeeming blood, well, that kind of savior can't save anybody. A dead savior could not ascend to the right hand of God to continually make application of his saving work on behalf of the children. But Hebrews 7:25 reminds us hence also, "He is able to save forever." How long? Save forever "those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." If he had attempted to die for our sins but he never rose, then his death would be proven or rather proof that he was inadequate for our justification. Him not being raised would be a public rejection by the Father that this was not sufficient. Oh, but this morning, child of God, cast the eyes of faith to the right hand of the Majesty on High and there he sits, not in a tomb, by his heavenly Father. There he sits at God's right hand permanently interceding for us and continually applying his saving work on our behalf.

He lives to prove our justification is settled. Secondly, he lives to continually prove that our enemies are crushed. Our enemies have no right, they have no bearing, they have no authority anymore. There Christ lay in death, executed for the debt of his children. He became sin and there he is dead. The prisoner of divine wrath, enslaved by divine justice but on the third day that first Easter morning, at the Father's command, the angel rolled the stone away and having fulfilled his mission, he comes, comes forth from the grave giving full assurance that all the powers of our enemies are crushed and up from the grave he arose with a mighty triumph over his foes. He arose a Victor from the dark domain, and he lives forever with his saints to reign. He arose! He arose! Hallelujah, Christ arose! Oh, sin's debt is paid. Death's victory is snatched away. The grave's hold is broken. Hell's claim is vanquished and Satan's authority is removed. He lives to assure us his enemies and our enemies are all crushed.

In the close out, let's think once again on Romans 4:25, the last part, "He was raised because of our justification." It means on account of. I, I like the idea of to ratify. It was in a sense ratified when he was raised. It was accomplished when he died and took the penal, penalty but when he rose again, it was publicly ratified, a formal ratification, if you will. In his death, justification was paid for however as long as the Savior lay in death's chamber, the payment though accomplished was not yet presented and it remained to be ratified or formally approved, but that to happen required his resurrection.

Let's say you owe a great debt and you, you're committed, you saw Dave Ramsey and you said, "I'm gonna pay this debt off." And you work and you work and you work and you get, you work overtime and you get a second job and you put money back and put money back and put money back, and finally the day comes when you have the amount of money in your account to pay off the debt. So the work's been done but it doesn't count until you go to the debtor and give him the funds. That's the resurrection. It's formally accomplished then.

Now I know you don't do this anymore, maybe a few of you do, but I used to go down to the utility building, the electric utility building in Sheffield and pay my utility bill. Where I live, we have, um, uh, Littleville Water and Sheffield Electric and Tusculumbia Gas. I, I

hold the whole Shoals together right there. So we'd go to one, go to another, go, but I would go in there sometimes and, and I had the money, I'd written the check but it didn't matter until she took the check and then I was cleared and she'd stamp it, "Paid."

That's the resurrection. That's the resurrection. The Lord Jesus walked up to Calvary, God's bill desk. He was there to pay a bill. He found that the debt against us was exceedingly great. It would cost his life and it would cost his blood, a price he was willing to pay and he did pay, and the resurrection is the stamped receipt that the debt can no longer be held against me. And every time Satan whispers to you and the world of the flesh whispers to you, "You're condemned and you're dirty, you're undeserving, you're vile, you're a sinner," and by the way, all of those are true, you need to look up in heaven and see that risen Savior and know that his resurrection is the formal ratification of your justification and nothing can be held against you. Listen, I've said nothing can be held against you if you've believed on Jesus Christ. The old songwriter said long ago, "Long ago the old account was settled. Long ago."

He is the ever-living proof that divine justice that was against us is satisfied, and on that cross as Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied, for every sin on him was laid. Yes, it was. In that moment of his death, the threatening thunderstorms of just wrath that was against us were fully satisfied and were instantly transformed into loving showers of blessing. The raging lion of God's fierce wrath was released upon Christ in our place and it devoured him. Now that same lion lay quietly passively on his back, paying us no mind for he has fully and eternally been satisfied and has eternally and fully satisfied his voracious appetite in the flesh of Jesus Christ. The vicious lion of wrath came on Jesus and he took all of his blows. The roaring blast of divine wrath has now been silenced into a sweet melody of redemption. It is finished. All that is needed for a sinner to be forgiven and welcomed into the loving embrace of God is done.

Paul says it powerfully here using Abraham as an example. Look at our text again, Romans 4:21, "and being," that's Abraham, "fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform." What he's saying is this is the parallel for us. Christ has promised or God the Father has promised rather, "Look to My Son Christ. Believe on Christ. Believe He did it all, all for your past, all for your present, and all for your future sin and transgressions. Believe on what I've promised through Him." That's what he's saying. Abraham did it, you can do it.

Verse 22, "Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness." When you believe it's put to your account that you now stand righteous, that's justification.

Verse 23, "Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead." Romans 3:28 reminds us, "For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from works of the Law."

Ben Haden told the story of a soldier in the world war who was injured, he was in the hospital and he'd had surgery. He came out of the surgery and the doctor said, "Soldier,

you've lost your arm." The soldier replied, "I didn't lose my arm, I gave my arm for France." The world may look on Calvary and the world may say he lost his life but no, no, no, no, this is God's plan. He didn't lose anything, he gave his life for the church and he rose again for her justification and it can be yours if you'd just believe on him. Just believe on him. Believe on him.