

United in Justification

a sermon in the series
Saved by His Life: Union with Christ

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Romans 4:25

Who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

Thus far we have looked at our union with Christ in the context of His death. Because we are united with Him—there is a union, a participation and identification with Him—we are united in His death, so we can say His death was ours. In our Lord's dying on the cross He died *to* sin and *for* sin. Therefore, whatever is true about Jesus as He's hanging there on the cross is also true for us. That means we have died to sin and our penalty for sin has been dealt with. The old man, who we were when sin ruled over us through our fallen human nature, has died. You are not that person anymore. We are free from the guilt and penalty of our sin and we are free from sin's enslavement. We are now one with Jesus.

The Apostle Paul's argument is, "knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin." But Paul does not stop with our union in the death of Christ. He continues in verse 8 of Romans 6, "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Romans 6:6-8)

The apostle follows the same order earlier in the chapter, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death." All of this talk about dying with Jesus doesn't really make a lot of sense since you and I didn't live two thousand years ago; how could we have died with Him and be one with Jesus if we weren't around then? It's really simple. If you put your confidence, your trust in Jesus—the Bible calls that faith—then you are identified with Him. You become one with Him. What does that look like? It looks like committing yourself to His keeping. You trust Him with you—your past, present and future. Your sins, your goodness, everything about you, have been committed into His keeping. That's what it means to trust someone.

We don't do it perfectly but from the moment we place our faith in Christ, the Father looks on you and sees Jesus Christ. He looks on Jesus Christ and He sees you. This is the truth that God has established. We call it the Gospel. It is good news.

Paul continues, “that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4).

We’re united in His death but we’re also united in His resurrection. When Jesus came out of that borrowed tomb He was not the same as when they put Him in there three days earlier. There was something different about Him. That’s a parallel for us. When we put our confidence in Christ, trusting Him with ourselves, we are no longer the same. Something is different about us. There is a new life and a power to live it. It is clear; our union with Christ is not only in death but also in life.

Because we are in Christ, whatever is true for Him is true for us. His resurrection is also our resurrection. For most Christians our union with Christ is no more than the death of Jesus. We see ourselves tied to Him in His death. We emphasize the cross more than the empty tomb. This is sad and it has sad consequences. I understand why we emphasize the cross over the empty tomb; we do so because we constantly feel the guilt of our sin and the cross is the payment of our sin debt. We can identify with His death more than His resurrection. We don’t feel so alive in Jesus. We don’t feel the resurrection power because we don’t always live like we ought to in this new life. But we do sin, so therefore we need and emphasize the cross.

Listen to the first part of our text, “He was offered up for our offenses.”

We’ve got that. We have offended God and continue to offend Him so we need this Savior who died for these offenses. We see and feel that so desperately. But we need the resurrection of Jesus equally if we are to be saved from sin and acceptable to God.

Jesus’ dead body was brought to life three days after His death. This was very central to the preaching of the apostles. In fact, they appear to emphasize the resurrection more than our Lord’s death, the very opposite of us. The resurrection was central to their gospel and therefore it was front and center in their preaching. Let me give you an example. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter’s sermon was primarily an explanation of Jesus’ resurrection and not His death. The result? Many people came to salvation.

Without the resurrection of Christ, His death has no power to save. Why? Let me show you.

I. The Resurrection of Jesus is the Justification of Jesus

When Jesus rose from the dead, God justified Him. To be justified means to be just or right. It is to be defined as innocent, without guilt, or acquitted of the charges of wrongdoing. Whether you know the definition of the word *justification* or not you know the process, and you learned it at a very early age. For example, children are playing and it turns ugly. They begin to argue and mom walks in and asks them why they are fighting among themselves. Immediately, each child begins to explain why they are right. How do they do that? By pointing the finger and blaming the others. They explain to their mother, usually in unison, why they are right and everyone else is wrong.

That is a form of justification and, in this case, self-justification. They are declaring to mom why they are right and not wrong. But our text is not about self-justification our text is about God justifying you. That is God declaring you are right and not wrong, even though you are wrong.

Our text, Romans 4:25, does not say anything about Jesus being justified, it's about us. God declaring us right when we're really wrong. Someone is probably asking, *If God says I'm right when I'm wrong, doesn't that make God wrong?* If it wasn't for the death and resurrection of Jesus, it would. So why am I talking about Jesus and His justification? Because our justification is based on the fact God justified Jesus. Jesus was justified because He was innocent. Another way to say it is, He was righteous. A word I like to refer to when talking of Jesus' justification is the word *vindication*. Jesus was vindicated at the resurrection. Jesus' resurrection is His justification. It is God announcing to the world that His Son was perfectly right in all He did, which was a vindication of Christ.

I'm sure it sounds strange to say Jesus was justified. His justification is different than ours. His justification is based upon the fact He was righteous. He was right and never wrong. Our justification with God is not based upon our behavior and actions because we are not righteous.

I've come to bring you good news today. It wouldn't be good news for me to say *you're wrong, therefore you're guilty, and therefore you've got to pay*. There is no good news in that. But it's the truth. All have sinned. What does it mean to sin? To fall short of the glory of God; to be un-Godlike. How many have been un-Godlike? All of us. The Bible condemns us all. Where is the good news?

The justification of Jesus is God saying, "My Son was never wrong. He was always right and I have vindicated Him by resurrecting Him. And now I'm going to give that to you. It's not based upon your behavior. It's not based upon your actions. It's not based upon your attitudes. Your justification is based upon the fact that I looked on My Son and saw Him perfectly righteous because He was."

That's real good news!

Therefore, if you are in Christ, you receive whatever Christ receives; whatever is true about Him in His role as your substitute is true about you. That's why the gospel is so sweet to my ears. That's why it's like medicine to my sick heart.

Let's examine Jesus' justification. Our text doesn't mention this, although it's there—He was raised for our justification—so how does the resurrection affect our justification?

We always think about Him dying, paying the penalty for our sins and thereby our guilt is transferred to Him because He is our substitute.

In I Timothy we read a letter from Paul to a young man in the ministry who was now probably pastoring in Ephesus. Paul writes to him a letter giving him more instruction on how to be a good pastor and in I Timothy 3:16 we read:

*“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, **Justified in the Spirit**, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.”*

What did the Apostle Paul mean when he said, “justified in the Spirit”?

It could mean that only the Holy Spirit can explain the entire life of Jesus. In other words, Paul is using the word *justified* as an explanation. The way you can justify the life of Christ is to understand that from beginning to end it was the Holy Spirit who sustained Him. What did the angel Gabriel say to Joseph and to Mary announcing His birth? “That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.” We see the Holy Spirit justifying, explaining, motivating, the very life of Christ. We see the Holy Spirit evidencing Himself and giving testimonies in the miracles of Jesus.

Perhaps this is what the Apostle Paul means. But I don’t think that’s what his emphasis is. It certainly would include that, but I think he’s got another trajectory, another thought he’s aiming at.

To find that thought you have to turn back to Romans.

“concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, ⁴ and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” (Romans 1:3-4)

In other words, Paul is saying that God declared that Jesus was His Son by the Holy Spirit in resurrecting Jesus.

The resurrection is God’s proof to the world that Jesus is the Son of God.

Why does Paul go to the very end of Jesus’ life on this earth and say that it’s the resurrection that declares Jesus to be the Son of God when, several times in Jesus’ life, God the Father declared Jesus to be His Son? Think about it. The announcement of Gabriel to Mary and Joseph, I just cited that. But the day of His birth the Bible tells us that an angel with a host of angels appears to shepherds and says, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Angelic creatures pronounced that He was the Son of God. Then you move 30 years later to the River Jordan and there that wild man John the Baptist, in his wooly clothing, immerses the Lord in the muddy water, lifts Him up and all of a sudden a light shown down and a voice that everyone could hear thundered. It was the voice of God saying, “This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” The Spirit came upon Him in the form and likeness of a dove. Certainly God declared Jesus that day to be His Son and the Holy Spirit anointed Him on that day so that everything He did was by the Holy Spirit. In fact, the writer to the Hebrews said that when Jesus offered Himself as a sacrifice for sins on the cross He did it through and by the Holy Spirit. There He is declared the Son of God.

But the Apostle Paul says there is a final and greater declaration from God concerning His Son and it's the resurrection. Here's why.

The resurrection is Jesus' justification. It was God saying to the world finally, "This is My Son," and in no greater way than by raising Him from the dead: This is the Promised One.

You've got to understand that when those men put Jesus on trial that day for His life they saw a man. That's all they saw.

When you think of deity, what do you think of? You think of brilliance, of power emanating and coming out of Him. In Revelation you see the description of God on His throne and men are literally crying to the rocks to cover them so they can be hidden from the face of Him who sits on the throne. He speaks with the voice of many thunders or many waterfalls. You think of this brilliant majesty as deity and here is this lowly man from Nazareth who was not humanly attractive, said Isaiah. There was nothing about Him that said, "God!" Only one time in Jesus' life was the glory ever evident and only three people saw that—Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. Otherwise, when you saw Him, you didn't see any lights or halos, you saw nothing to indicate He was more than a man.

What about His miracles? That doesn't prove He was God. Moses performed miracles. Elijah performed miracles. Others had performed miracles before Him. But nobody ever by his own power and authority ever got up out of the grave and never died again.

This is the final and greatest evidence, so that when those wicked men tried the only righteous One, all they saw was a rabble-rouser, a seditious worker plotting to overthrow their leadership, and they found Him guilty. They did not see a holy man, they saw someone who was threatening their power and had to be exterminated. But when Jesus was raised from the dead, God said, "This is My holy Son in whom there is no iniquity!" The resurrection proved Jesus was who He said He was.

It proved His message was exactly the Word of God sent to us. When Jesus spoke, you were hearing what God wanted you to hear. When you read those letters in red, you're hearing the voice of the Father through His Son who was the express image of the Father.

So when God raised Him from the dead He was vindicating His Son and saying, "Listen, you just tried to silence My voice. This is My Son. He was speaking with My authority and My words and you tried to silence that. I declare Him to be My Son."

When He hung on the cross He was found guilty of blasphemy, making Himself equal with God. But as He was hanging there, He was hanging as your substitutional sacrifice.

He marched into the execution chamber that was marked with your name, and God's indignation, hatred and righteous anger against your sins was unleashed on Him. God raised Him from

the dead because He was innocent of all those sins and thereby proved He was innocent by the resurrection. When Jesus died, in His final breaths He uttered this statement, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Isn’t that a strange question? Jesus knew why He had been forsaken but He wanted it to be clear to all of us today. He said that not just for Peter, James and John. He said it for you this very day. He was the spotless Lamb of God without spot, wrinkle or blemish. No sin had He committed, therefore He could fully take your sin and die for it. The resurrection says, God is satisfied, His Son perfectly fulfilled His will as our penal substitute.

Raised from the dead on the third day, declared by God that He was holy, righteous and just—an ample substitute for our sins. That was Jesus’ justification. I must quickly move on.

II. The Resurrection of Jesus is Our Justification

There is a bodily resurrection that is coming one day, but we’re not talking about that. We’re talking about how right now you and I are raised with Jesus. I am not the same person I was, though I sometimes do the same things that I did. I’m not the same person; I have a new identity and a new life source. Before I was saved, the source of my life was sin. Sin is so masterful in its deception that it gets you to believe it is really you calling the shots when the truth is you’re just a slave doing what you’re told. But now I have a new identity.

Because Jesus rose from the dead and God justified His Son, God now takes Jesus’ justification and hands it over to you freely, with no strings attached.

A. We Are Justified.

“Who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”

My sins! That’s why He was riveted to a cross, why He was speared and hung there in shame, in abject reproach. But praise God He was raised!

It is amazing that when God sees me, and all of my brothers and sisters in this room, He looks upon us with the same favor He looks upon His Son, who did everything He was told to do without sin.

We are justified because Jesus was justified, vindicated, by the Father and that’s now been transferred to us.

To understand these words it might help to think of a man in our day guilty of breaking the law, caught and arrested, and sentenced to serve time. Once he has served his sentence he is released a free man, vindicated of all charges and no longer carries the guilt of the penalty because he has satisfied justice. In our place, Christ Jesus was caught, arrested, found guilty, sentenced and executed, and then imprisoned in the tomb of death for three days. Part of the sentence God placed on our Savior was that He had to come under the reign of death and be shut up as a prisoner behind the bars of death.

Day one, He is subjected to His imprisonment. Day two, there is no freedom yet. Day three, nothing happens until after the third night. Something happens.

God above sends an angel below to roll away the stone and release the Prisoner because the Prisoner has served the time. The sentence has been fulfilled. It is now finished. Done. Otherwise, He would not have been set free.

Do you now understand what I'm saying? Jesus served our sentence for us and He's been set free. The resurrection is about Christ being set free from the imprisonment that we should have suffered eternally. He has been set free, which means justice is no longer clamoring for satisfaction; it has been satisfied in full. He's free. And so are we who believe.

B. The Results of Justification.

I don't have time to go into all the results of justification today. But what I can tell you is that as a result of Jesus being raised from the dead and my union with Christ, I get what God the Father gave to Him. This means:

1. No guilt, no shame, no hiding.

When the first sin of the human race was committed, what was the reaction? It was to hide. God comes later that day and asks the infamous question, "Adam, where are you?"

He said, "I was naked and ashamed, therefore I hid."

"Who told you you were naked?"

Nobody had to tell Adam. Do you know what he was experiencing? Not his nudity but his shame and embarrassment. It was the sting of his conscience. So Adam hid. And that's what we've been doing ever since the garden. We hide from the only One who can help us. That's the tendency of us still, to get as far away from God as possible. Our guilt is like a cloud; it dogs us wherever we go.

The gospel says there is no more need to hide because there is no more shame. You should feel shame when you sin. Shame is your conscience telling you that you've done wrong. But your shame should not be to the degree that you should hide from God because there Jesus took your shame, therefore you suffer it no more. Not in the eyes of God.

When God looks upon His children, He does not do so with any embarrassment at all. None. Why? Because He forsook His Son and all the feelings of embarrassment and shame were put on Him. I don't have to hide from God anymore.

I think we quote Hebrews 4:16 completely wrong, which says, “Let us come boldly to a throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.”

We use this verse when we're in trouble. If you can't pay your light bill, you can quote Hebrews 4:16 telling yourself you can go to God in prayer and He will supply your need. Or if your child is sick you say, “I have a need and I can come boldly to a throne of grace and ask God for this grace and He will give it.” Well, I think this verse can certainly apply to these crises, but it's not the main point the author is trying to make. I'm not saying you can't use that verse to pray for your sick loved one, but what I think the author is trying to say is that you don't have to hide anymore. When you sin, you don't need to hide. When do you need mercy the most? When you have sinned.

The vindication of Jesus has achieved God's approval of us. There is now no closed bars or gates forbidding us to approach heaven's throne. He does not forbid us to come because He's holy and we are not. No, not at all. He says, “Come! Don't hide. Daddy loves you! Come! I'm not going to put you away I will receive you. There's mercy here.”

That's what being justified based upon the resurrection means.

2. No more trying and failing to make things right with God.

One of the things that has dogged me all my life is the sense of having to make things right. I've got to make things right. I blew it. I've got to make it right. But the more I try to make it right, the more I fail. Especially with God.

Some of us have a gospel that is the gospel of self-righteousness. That gospel says that once you sin you have to do something to make up for the sin. You've got to repair the damage you have done. But that's not the gospel! There is no trying to make up with God. God is not against you, because His Son has already made up for you. If being right with God required a miracle called the resurrection to make us right with God, how do you still believe that by good works you can make God accept you? How do you think trying to repair the damage of your sin is going to bear with God? How does that work? That is a faulty mindset, which comes as a result of a lack of understanding the gospel. It is our desire to be in control and do it ourselves.

There is no more of that now that we've been justified. When I sin, my relationship with my Father does not receive any kind of damage. Why? Because Jesus was separated from my Father and received the damage my sin created.

I'm not saying that when you sin there is no consequences, I'm saying that when you sin you ought to practice the Gospel. You need to start thinking with a gospel-orientation. Let me give you an example of what you can do when you sin.

“Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.” (Romans 8:34)

When Paul sins and Satan whispers accusations in Paul’s conscious, what does Paul do? He goes back to the cross and the resurrection. He reminds himself that even prayers don’t make you right with God when you sin. It’s the prayers and intercession of Jesus. He tells himself the gospel and that’s what we are to do when we sin.

Some of you say this is too good to be true. If that’s what you believe, then you don’t believe the Gospel.

3. *The idol of being right is destroyed.*

Every one of you in this room want to be right. You never like being wrong, no one does. But there are some of us by our natural constitution and by life detest more than other being wrong. We have a deathly fear of being wrong so much so that we strive for people to accept us. It becomes the most important thing. To be right has become an idol to us. Therefore we strive to please people. Sometimes we become overachievers to be seen as right. Sometimes we hide ourselves away and never venture to try something because we can’t bear the pain of being wrong. Why? Because being right is our god.

The Gospel says that you can be free from the enslaving power of this idol. Since you are justified in the sight of God you are always right in His sight. The righteousness of Jesus Christ has been transferred to you and that means God always looks on you as His righteous ones. You don’t have to strive to be right. You don’t have to labor and sacrifice to the idol of rightness.

The Jews and Gentiles couldn’t convict Jesus on any charge of wrongdoing. They couldn’t find Him guilty of stealing because He had nothing, except the clothes on His back. They couldn’t find Him guilty of murder because it was on record that He had raised several from the dead. They couldn’t convict Him of bigotry because He associated with the objects of bigotry and prejudice. So what could they get Him on? The only thing they could level against Him was that He claimed to be God. In other words, they killed Him for being right since He was and is God. But what I want you to see is how Jesus responded to that.

Here He is, the only person who is right—completely right. And yet, He was willing to be considered worse than wrong, a blasphemer, a sinner worthy of death.

In other words, Jesus never depended on other people’s acceptance of Him. All He cared about was the acceptance of the Father.

If I understand the gospel that says because of Jesus I am always right in the sight of God, as faulty and fragile I am, I don’t have to bow before the idol of rightness. I don’t have to live my life striving to be something I’m not. I’m free. I’m free to be all God wants me to be because He sees me

in the light of Jesus Christ. That is liberty. Wonderful liberty. And when that happens, the fourth thing will happen.

4. *Judgmentalism is countered.*

We are all guilty of judgmentalism. Now there are times the Bible says when a brother or sister slips into sin we should help them. But we don't judge them. In fact, we go meekly for we realize we could do the very same thing, and perhaps we have. That's not judgmentalism. Judgmentalism is when you point the finger in order to make yourself look good, or when you say things about people because it makes you feel superior. When we accuse others in a judgmental way, we are trying to cast the blame off us and put it on someone else. It's the same thing children do that we shared earlier.

When I really believe the gospel and the gospel is impacting me I don't need you to think I'm right, I don't have to judge anyone. I don't have to make you look bad to make me look good. I'm free of that. I can now love you for who you are, warts and all, sin and all.

A church that is not in unity is a church that is denying the gospel.

5. *The resurrected Jesus lives in me.*

I don't have to try to live the Christian life. I have the Christian life in me. Unfortunately, we have constructed a gospel that is about two-thirds right and the rest depends on us. So we constantly walk feeling less than acceptable to God because we don't believe the gospel. We rightly believe that we are to walk holy before the Lord but we try and fail and try and fail. But that's all gone now that I'm justified and given the righteousness of Christ. I now have a Savior that has been raised from the dead. He now lives in me and has promised to live His life through me.

This is going to be the emphasis over the next couple of weeks. We are saved by His life. Saved by *His life*. The resurrected Savior lives within me and He is teaching me as I live how to yield to His control. That's what we call sanctification. You're learning how to trust Jesus who lives in you so He can glorify Himself in you.

As I conclude, there are some of us in this room who have been saved but are still trying to help God save us by our own righteousness. The way you can know that's true of you is by looking at what you do when you sin. How do you respond to your sin? Do you ball up? Do you hide? If that's the way you feel about God you may be a Christian, but you still haven't learned the gospel and it's not effectual in your life. It was good enough to get you saved and remove the penalty of your sin, but you haven't learned that it's also for life today.

Then there are some of you who believe you are Christians because you are good people. You are moral. You don't do the things we typically associate with evilness, but you have never been saved because you have an idol you have worshipped all these years. You've never yielded to

Christ. Your life is all about you. I pray you hear the gospel today and realize what you're serving will not help you in the end. Your god cannot save you. But Christ can.

Then there are people who are not Christians and know they're not. You've not experienced anything I've talked about today. Do you hear the good news today? This can be yours. God doesn't have favorites. The Bible says He shows no partiality. The good news, my friend, is that God in Christ can forgive you and make you righteous in His sight and deliver you from all the things we talked about.

What do I have to do? That's the wrong question. If you ask that, you haven't really heard the gospel yet. That's the question the young rich ruler asked. He came to Jesus and said, "What must I do? I've kept all of these commandments but I know there is something missing. What else do I do?" By asking that question he nullified the gospel. The gospel says there is nothing for you to do because Jesus has done it all.

All you have to do is trust what He's done and at that moment you are put into Him and He is put into you and the two of are one. At that moment you are safe in Christ. Let's all run quickly to our Refuge, Jesus, this morning, who was offered up for our offenses and was raised because of our justification. Amen.