

***THE MESSAGE OF JUSTIFICATION:  
DELIVERED AND RESURRECTED FOR US  
ROMANS 4:23-25***

In Geneva, Switzerland, there is a park near the church where John Calvin preached and conducted his ministry. In that park there is a memorial wall containing the statues of 10 of the leading men of the 16th Century Reformation. The center group of statues are of William Farel, John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and John Knox. And written in large letters to the left and right of these center statues are the words, *Post Tenebras Lux*, “After darkness, light.”



Those words are a fitting explanation of the essence of the Reformation and the work of the Reformers: after the theological darkness of some thousand years, the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ shone again. And what specifically shone, was the message of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. This is a message for the ages — not just for the Reformation, but for all people in every place in all of recorded history. As Paul has been demonstrating in Romans 3-4, justification through faith alone has always been God’s way of bringing men to salvation. And what Paul will demonstrate in the closing portion of this section on salvation is that justification through faith was true in Abraham’s life, it was true in Paul’s day, and it is true in our day as well.

What does Paul say in these verses? He teaches that:

***JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE HAS BEEN AND ALWAYS WILL BE THE ONLY WAY TO BE RIGHT WITH GOD.***

Justification is unchanged and unchanging. What produced justification in the life of Abraham is the same thing that produces justification in us today. This is the gospel message and it is the gospel message in six words; notice how Paul demonstrates the process and provision of justification in these verses:

1. **GRACE** — the Provision of Justification (vv. 23-24a)
2. **FAITH** — the Means of Justification (v. 24b)
3. **GOD** — the Object of Justification by Faith (v. 24c)
4. **CHRIST** — the Redeemer for Justification (v. 24d)
5. **MAN** — the Reason for Justification (v. 25a)
6. **HOPE** — the Validation of Justification (v. 25b)

## 1. GRACE — the Provision of Justification (vv. 23-24a)

- The Israelites thought about Abraham primarily as their father; of all the patriarchs, one stood above the rest, and that was Abraham. They were confident of their status as privileged and redeemed people simply because of their physical lineage from Abraham (e.g., [Jn. 8:33, 39](#)). But as Jesus demonstrated, they needed more than just a biological connection to Abraham to be right with God ([Mt. 3:9](#)). They also needed the kind of faith Abraham had; and that is Paul's point in Romans 4, which he summarizes in vv. 23-24a.
- If you are going to summarize Abraham's life, it could be summarized with this sentence: He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness (Rom. 4:3, 9, 22, 23). Of all that he did and all that God accomplished through him, that is the definitive statement of his life. And as you look again at that statement, notice what God did and how Abraham did nothing to be right with God.
  - ✓ **It was credited to him** is a reference to a banking term; it means that something was placed in his spiritual account with God that he did not gain for himself. Someone else (God) made this deposit on his behalf. And that has been the emphasis throughout this chapter:
    - Abraham didn't work for this credit of righteousness (vv. 2-5);
    - He didn't get it through circumcision, because it was given to him prior to circumcision (v. 9-10);
    - And he didn't get it through obedience to the Law because the Law came 500 years after he received the gift (vv. 13-16) and the Law cannot save and can only condemn (v. 15).
    - This gift of justification is only a gift of grace and nothing else.
  - ✓ And notice also that Paul says that there was a record of the giving of that gift to Abraham and the record is contained in God's word — **it was written**. This is a minor point, but it reinforces what we've already said: Abraham didn't write this declaration, but someone else wrote it *for him* (and for us). Who wrote it? Well, Moses was the man who put the pen to paper to write the account, but who was behind the writing and who was the one who made the declaration about Abraham's status as a justified man? It was God. And on what basis did God make this declaration and write this summary sentence of Abraham's life? He made it on the basis of *grace*.
  - ✓ And that grace is still the same provision for our justification — notice v. 24a: **but for our sake also**. This is Paul's great summary statement about Abraham and justification: the benefit of justification is still received only and always by grace alone.
- Many of you are very generous givers; you love to give and share what you have with others as an expression of your love for Christ. You are gracious givers. But to be justified before God means that we must also be gracious receivers. We don't give to God to become justified; we receive from God to be justified. Justification is only and always by grace alone. It was a gift to Abraham and it is a gift to us.

- Justification is a gift of God’s grace. But not all men receive that gift. To receive the gift, one must have...

## 2. FAITH — the Means of Justification (v. 24b)

- Notice that the accreditation of justification is given only to those **who believe in Him**.
  - ✓ The verb **believe** is from the same root as the noun **faith** (vv. 5, 9, 11-13, 16, 19, 20).
  - ✓ And this verb is a present tense, having the idea of an ongoing and persistent faith. To believe in Christ is not to believe one time and then to keep on living the way we were living. To believe is to continue in that faith and to continue to demonstrate allegiance to God.
  - ✓ Justification is only granted to those who have faith in God and Christ. There is *no* other way.
- Mankind has always been enticed to corrupt justification by faith alone; the corruption comes in one of two ways, primarily:
  - ✓ *Salvation by merit* — this is the issue of “works” salvation that Paul addressed in vv. 2-8 particularly. This form of “salvation” is an exaltation of self. We see it most often/readily in the Roman Catholic Church. A few weeks ago I noted what was written in the Counsel of Trent:

“If anyone says, that by faith alone the ungodly are justified in such a way as to mean that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to receive the grace of Justification and that it is not necessary for a man to be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema....If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which forgives sins for Christ’s sake; or that we are justified by this confidence alone; let him be anathema.” [Quoted in *Why the Reformation Still Matters*, 30.]

- ✓ *Salvation without works* — this is antinomianism that says that there doesn’t need to be obedience after salvation; obedience is beneficial, but not necessary. But true justification results in the indwelling of the Spirit and the Spirit will always produce His work and fruit. The justification that is by faith alone is never alone — it always produces some measure of fruit (1:5; 16:26; Gal. 5:22ff). Antinomian “salvation” is an indulgence of self (and sin). It pursues what the flesh desires rather than what the Lord requires.
- What Paul emphasizes in these verses is that justification must always be and can only be received *through faith* in Christ alone. And when we say that faith is the means by which justification is received, we don’t mean that justification is a work; by definition, faith means, “I cannot; I entrust myself to one who can.” Faith is merely the outstretched hand that receives the gift that is being given.
- To receive the grace gift of justification, one must believe and they specifically must believe in...

### 3. GOD — the Object of Justification by Faith (v. 24c)

- Notice that Paul says, **who believe in Him...**
  - ✓ The “Him” in this verse refers to God the Father. Generally when we say that to be justified one must believe in Christ (and he must), but here Paul emphasizes something additional — the believer must believe in the same God that Abraham believed.
  - ✓ So Paul is pre-empting the notion that is popular in our day, “you just need to believe...” What you believe is not at all important, just believe in something and it will be all right.
    - You need to believe in hope (because miracles happen every day).
    - You need to believe in love.
    - You need to believe in dreams.
    - You need to believe in science and what you can see.
    - You need to believe in belief and the power of positive thinking.
    - You need to believe in something bigger than yourself.
    - You need to believe in yourself (and you will be unstoppable).
  - ✓ But Paul notes that what one believes, and *whom* one believes in is essential and only One will prove to be satisfying in the end — belief in God. This is a repeated theme in the NT:

- *Acts 9:42* It became known all over Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.
- *Acts 11:17* “Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?”
- *Acts 16:31* They said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.”
- *Acts 22:19* “And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You...”
- *Rom. 9:33* just as it is written, “BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.”
- *Rom. 10:11* For the Scripture says, “WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.”
- *1 Tim. 1:16* Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

- Hebrews 11 is well known as the faith chapter in the NT, and the key verse in that chapter is v. 6 — “And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” To have saving faith one must believe in God. This is the faith that Abraham had — it was not just a faith in God to do a miracle in his “dead” body, but faith that the Word (promise) of God to bless the world through him was true and that God was able and trustworthy to accomplish His promise to Abraham. It will not do to have a general faith in God; it is the God of the promise that both Abraham and we believe.
- To receive the grace gift of justification one must believe in God, and specifically in God’s provision of...

#### 4. **CHRIST — the Redeemer for Justification (v. 24d)**

- And specifically, Paul says that the believer believes in the One **who raised Jesus from the dead**. That is, we don't just believe in God in general terms, but we believe in Him as the raiser of Christ. Cf. Rom 8:11; Rom. 10:9; Acts 3:15; 4:10; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:15; 2 Cor 4:14; 1 Pet 1:21. What a number of those verses emphasize is that the only reason we have hope for resurrection from God is that He raised Christ; if He raised Christ, then He can and will also raise us who believe in Christ.
- There is no life without the resurrected Christ (Rom. 5:18,21; 6:4-7); Christ resurrected is crucial.
- This is the same kind of faith Abraham exercised. We believe in the same God who has the same power. Abraham lived in a different historical context and had a different amount of revelation from God, but he and we believe in the same God who has the same power to resurrect from the dead.
- What Abraham specifically believed that resulted in justification was different than what we believe: Abraham believed the promise of God of a land, seed, and blessing (the "seed" is particularly emphasized in Gen. 15); what we believe is the work and resurrection of Christ. But the object of our belief is the same — we believe in the same God; and we believe in the same ability and power of God — to resurrect dead men to life. Abraham believed in God's resurrection power and so do we.
- To receive the grace gift of justification, one must believe in God and His provision of Christ; it must be that way because we understand the universal condition of...

#### 5. **MAN — the Reason for Justification (v. 25a)**

- Fundamentally, we believe in Christ because we do not and cannot believe in ourselves. Our transgressions not only condemned us, but Christ **was delivered over because of our transgressions**.
- The word "delivered over" is interesting. Almost half the NT uses of this word are in reference to the crucifixion of Christ and many of those refer to Judas' actions against Christ; in those instances the word is translated "betrayed." By his act of betrayal, Judas "delivered" Jesus to the Jews to be crucified.
- But the NT also emphasizes that God Himself delivered Christ to the cross (Acts 2:22-23; Rom. 8:32).
  - ✓ God had no part in the sin of men that crucified Christ. And God gave no excuse to the men who crucified Christ as part of His eternal plan.
  - ✓ Yet, it is also clear that God is the sovereign hand behind these events orchestrating them for His purposes. Christ's death was purposeful and it was intended and planned by God. This is very similar to what Isaiah writes in Is. 53:5, 10 — the Suffering Servant was pierced, crushed, chastened, and scourged; and he experienced those sufferings because of God's purposeful plan (v. 10).
  - ✓ One commentator has expressed the theology of this verse well:

“The crucifixion of Christ being the greatest of all crimes, was hateful and highly provoking in the sight of God; yet it was the will of God that it should take place, in order to bring to pass the greatest good. God decreed this event; He willed that it should come to pass, and ordered circumstances, in His providence, in such a way as gave men an opportunity to carry into effect their wicked intentions. In their sin God had no part; and His determination that the deed should be done, formed no excuse for its perpetrators, nor did it in any degree extenuate their wickedness, which the Scriptures charge upon them in the fullest manner. ‘Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain,’ Acts 2:23.” [Haldane, 190-1.]

- And the reason he was delivered over was ***because of our transgressions***.
  - ✓ The word “transgressions” doesn’t refer to our sin nature, but to all of our individual sins. And the word in other places is translated as something like, “misstep,” or “false step.” It is to step outside a known boundary; it is a willful rejection of God’s authority over man.
  - ✓ And notice that Paul says the *cause* of Christ’s crucifixion was our transgressions. It emphasizes the purity of Christ and that His death was not necessary for Himself. He died because of *our* transgressions, not His own.
  - ✓ N.B.: To say that our sins *caused* Christ’s death emphasizes God’s grace. If you think about it, there is not a straight line between our sins and Christ’s death. There are other more straight line connections between our behavior and consequences: if I drive 70 mph on 377 past Wal-Mart, I will get a ticket; if I eat a quart of Blue Bell every night I will gain weight; if I embezzle funds from my employer I will get fired and go to jail. But my sin does not *directly* necessitate Christ’s death. But it does necessitate Christ’s death in that it was part of God’s eternal plan to redeem sinners and glorify Christ. It is necessary because redeemed sinners are the Father’s gift to the Son so that they will forever enjoy and delight in the Son (Jn. 6:37-40, 44).
  - ✓ This brief clause “shows the need of Christ’s death.” [Haldane] Nothing else would satisfy God and nothing else would provide freedom from our sin. Eternal Hell for us would not release us from our just condemnation. Only Christ could effectively atone for our sin. Our sin mandated His death if there would be justification for any sinner. This demonstrates the magnitude of our sin. It is not a trifle.
  - ✓ Any sin and all sin is condemning. Remember Romans 1? Remember the summary of sins (vv. 28ff)? Along with all manner of sexual sin and murder, God puts disobedience to parents and being unloving. What we dismiss as the normal and excusable terrible twos and brush off as being “a little prickly,” God says is enough to condemn us to Hell. James does something similar in Js. 2:9-11 when he categorizes racism and partiality and favoritism as severe as sin as murder and idolatry.
  - ✓ This is a reminder of the gravity of our sin and the weightiness of our sin. Never overlook or excuse your sin (yours or any one else’s, but especially your own). Sin — any sin, all sin, and one sin — damns us to Hell for all eternity. Sin — any sin, all sin, and one sin — caused Christ’s death.
- When one believes in God and Christ and receives the grace gift of justification, it provides great...

## 6. HOPE — the Validation of Justification (v. 25b)

- Not only was Christ delivered over because of our sins, but He was also ***raised because of our justification***. This is the second time in this passage that Paul emphasizes that the Father has resurrected the Son (cf. v. 24b). Here ***raised*** indicates that Jesus didn't raise Himself but that someone else resurrected Him (cf. **6:4; 8:11**).
- The question in this verse is, what does Paul mean, "because of" our justification? Probably the best way to understand it is to say it was "for the sake of" our justification or "because of the need to justify..." In other words, without the resurrection, there would be no justification. For sinners to be justified necessitated both Christ's death *and* resurrection. They cannot and must not be separated.
- So this means that the raising of Christ from the dead is the source of our justification; Christ was raised from the dead to accomplish justification. Without the resurrection, there would be no righteousness to impute to those who believe, because it would mean that He was still under the condemnation of God. The resurrection is the demonstration to the world that He has satisfied the wrath of God and that He is no longer under God's wrath. God has been propitiated. And thus, there is justification available to impute to others. This clause reverberates with the sound of **1:4** — "who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead..."
- And friends, the resurrection is not just the final affirmation of Christ's justifying ability, but the resurrection is our *hope*. If He was resurrected, then we will also be resurrected. There is no victory for sin or death. There is life with God in eternity. The graves of believers will be emptied to send them to Heaven to be with the Triune God for all eternity and be freed from all sin — and that freedom is experienced even now on earth (**5:10-11; 6:4-7**). This is what the resurrection of Christ and justification do for all believers — it gives us hope now and for all eternity.

## **CONCLUSION:**

When you want to communicate the gospel of justification (how to be right with God) to an unbeliever, what is your message? Here it is in six short words:

- ✓ Grace — justification is a gift from God that is undeserved and it is received by...
- ✓ Faith — we simply acknowledge that we cannot earn/achieve God's righteous standard on our own so we entrust ourselves to Him — we believe in...
- ✓ God — like Abraham, the object of our faith is God, and we supremely believe in His provision of salvation and justification through...
- ✓ Christ — the perfect God-Man who lived the perfectly righteous life no one else has; He alone is righteous and on the cross he took the place of...
- ✓ Man — bearing the sins of men and absorbing and satisfying the wrath of God against that sin and providing...
- ✓ Hope — since He was resurrected, authenticating His acceptance before God and fulfillment of the salvation plan, then we also have the hope of resurrection and that we will be with Him in eternity.

This is the gospel message of justification: grace, faith, God, Christ, man, and hope. It was unchanging from Abraham until today and into eternity. This is what we tell sinners who have not been reconciled to God. And if you are not a Christian and follower of Christ, this is what you must believe to be saved. You cannot save yourself. You are under the condemnation of God. And if you believe, as Abraham did, in the God who saves sinners through the resurrection of the dead (and supremely in the resurrection of Christ), then you will be saved. You cannot save yourself; you must believe in the God who saves sinners. And I call you to repent of (turn away from) your sins today, and begin trusting in Christ as your Savior.

**BENEDICTION:** Jude 24-25