

Resurrection Sunday "Raised for our Justification"

Romans 4:23-25

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23 But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (Rom 4:23-25).

I have a confession to make. I love tidbits of useless knowledge. I am relentlessly curious, and I love those little nuggets of random information. Let me give you a few examples:

- A cockroach can live several weeks with its head cut off
- A giraffe can clean its ears with its 21 inch tongue
- A sneeze travels out of your mouth at over 100 m.p.h.
- Mosquitoes have teeth
- Most American car horns beep in the key of F
- A mole can dig a tunnel 300 feet long in just one night

Let me give you a few interesting nuggets of information on Easter:

- The council of Nicea in 325 AD determined that all Christians should celebrate Easter on the same date
- Easter is always the first Sunday after the full moon
- The name Easter comes from Eastre, an Anglo-Saxon goddess symbolized by a rabbit and an egg
- Next year Easter will be on April 4

Easter is the most celebrated Sunday during the calendar year. All over the world churches will be filled with a record number of people. Why? What makes Easter or Resurrection Sunday so special and important?

Your first answer might be that Easter is celebration of Christ's resurrection. Or perhaps you would answer that it marks the end of Holy Week and Lent. Or perhaps it has always been a part of your tradition – you went to church on Easter.

This morning I want to help you understand why Easter is critical to the Christian faith, why it is celebrated so enthusiastically, and why it really deserves careful and personal consideration. What is so special about Easter?

Our text (Romans 4:25) links two concepts – resurrection and justification. The union of these words creates the essence of the message of the Bible and the basis for salvation. In other words, these two words are important because one's eternal destiny hangs on them. That's right – people go to Heaven or Hell depending on what they do with these two words.

Therefore my aim today is to answer two questions. 1) What is justification? 2) Why is resurrection linked to justification?

And my prayer is that you will see Easter as more than just another Sunday or as a trivial Sunday worship service. My prayer is that you will see the significance of what we celebrate on this day.

What is Justification?

Romans 4:25 says, "{he} was delivered up for our transgressions and raised for our justification." So it is pretty clear from the text that the purpose of Jesus' resurrection was justification – a big, theological word. What does it mean?

1. It means to be declared righteous

The word means to render someone innocent, and it is used in a legal sense. It is like an acquittal, and it carries with the language of a courtroom where someone has been legally declared to be not guilty, innocent of all charges, and free from penalty. The person who is justified is declared to be without blame.

Now in the Bible, the term justification refers to the definitive act by God where he legally declares guilty sinners to be righteous. The Bible is unequivocally clear on three points: 1) God is holy (Isaiah 6:3), 2) human beings have violated God's law and are sinners (Rom 3:23), and 3) sin has a penalty (Rom 6:23). Justification is something the God, as sovereign judge of all creation, declares over sinful human beings. It is a legal judgment declaring you to be something that you are not. It doesn't make you perfect; it doesn't mean you didn't sin. It means that God treats as if you are perfect or righteous.

2. It is based upon the undeserving death of Jesus

Justification is only possible because of two things: 1) the sinless life of Jesus, and 2) his death. Jesus lived a perfect life, fully obeying the law of God. Therefore all the righteous demands were fulfilled in him. He obeyed perfectly; he was sinless; and therefore he didn't

deserve death. Jesus was and is the only human being to ever walk planet earth who didn't deserve to die.

His perfect life meant that his death was not deserved. And it is on the basis of his perfect righteousness and undeserving death that justification is even possible. Justification isn't possible without the death of Jesus. Why?

3. It reconciles forgiveness and justice

Justification isn't possible without the death of Jesus because God cannot arbitrarily declare a guilty person innocent without violating the principle of justice. God cannot forgive sins without also fulfilling the demands of justice. To do so would be to violate the very essence of his holiness.

God cannot just say, "Hey, no big deal on your sins. Let's just act like that didn't happen." It would be like the New York judge in the Bernard Madoff case simply saying, "Okay, we all make mistakes. Let's just forgive this whole thing. Mr. Madoff you are free to go." It would violate every sense of justice!

Justification involves the forgiveness of sins for human beings while still satisfying the demands for justice through the death of Jesus. The declaration of forgiveness is not possible without the justice being satisfied. But because of the death of Jesus God can be "both just and justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26).

4. It is a divine exchange of punishment and righteousness

Remember, justification in the Bible means to declare someone righteous. It means to acquit someone, but it also means much more than that. This is my favorite part! It means that there is a divine exchange of punishment and righteousness. Let me explain.

Sometimes people think that the message of the Bible is just about forgiveness. That is true but not complete. Justification means two things: 1) a forgiving of sins, and 2) a granting (or imputing) of righteousness. This means that believers in Jesus are given a double and amazing blessing: they are forgiven for their sin and they are declared to have never sinned.

God does something amazing through Christ. He not only washes away our sin. He considers us as perfectly keeping the law. He treats us as if we never violated his law – not even once! He declares us to be legally righteous even though we are not.

5. It is an act of infinite grace

Now if you fully understand this, you will have one thought invading your mind – this is not fair! “God takes the death of Jesus, counts that as sufficient for me, and then he declares me, in a legal and official sense, to be righteous?”

Yes. The Bible says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1). God declares that those put their faith in Jesus’ death as their own are counted righteous – “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...to be received by faith” (Rom 3:24-25).

If you get this and understand it you will know why John Newton, a converted former slave-trader, said:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

So that is what justification is all about. It is central to the message of the Bible; it is the undergirding truth of salvation; and it is the difference between heaven and hell.

Why is Resurrection linked to Justification?

So how is the resurrection of Jesus connected to all of this? Why does Romans 4:25 say “raised for our justification”? Why is the resurrection of Jesus linked to justification?

1. It declares God’s acceptance of Jesus’ suffering and death as payment for sin

Forgiveness was the goal of the death of Jesus, and forgiveness involves not only a wiping away of previous sins, it means the restoration of relationship. That is the difference between punishment and forgiveness. Punishment means that sins are paid for. Forgiveness means that a person is restored.

Jesus’ suffering and death paid for the sins of those who would believe in him. He was punished for the sins of others. But that was only half of it. His resurrection restores him back to life and relationship with the Father. Therefore the resurrection of Jesus declares that his payment of sins was fully accepted. The resurrection says “Mission Accomplished!”

2. It proclaims God’s favor toward Christ

As Jesus hung on the cross he said, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46). From 12:00 until 3:00 PM, the time of the daily sacrifice at the temple, darkness

covered Jerusalem. Jesus became the ultimate sacrifice, and he absorbed the wrath of the Father's justice for the plague of sin in the world.

We are familiar with the object of the cross as a symbol of hope, but in Jesus' day the cross was an object of being cursed by God. The Old Testament even stated it plainly that a man hanged on a tree is cursed (see Deut 21:23 and Gal 3:13).

Therefore without the resurrection, the sacrifice of Christ would have been seen as a statement of God's displeasure and his curse. But the resurrection clearly communicates not only that the mission of Jesus was accomplished; it tells us that God's favor is eternally turned toward Jesus.

3. It establishes justification as a possibility in this lifetime

Jesus is alive! And the result is the establishment of justification as a possibility right now! It means that there is nothing left, nothing needed, nothing lacking for you to be forgiven. Jesus' work was finished, and the resurrection opens the door for any who would put their faith in the risen Christ. The resurrection establishes justification as a reality – NOW!

4. It announces favor and forgiveness to those who believe in Jesus

The resurrection announces that the favor and forgiveness of God through the work of Jesus is offered to any who believe in Him. It means that God will take the punishment afflicted upon Jesus and he will count that as your punishment. But there is more.

It means that he will take the favor and forgiveness purchased by Jesus and apply it to you. But there even more. He will take the resurrection of Jesus and promise you that one day you too will rise from grave.

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Rom 5:1-2).

The result? Hope!

5. It unites believers to Jesus, empowering us to follow Him!

When Jesus died, I died. When Jesus rose, I rose. The Bible tells us that believers are united to Jesus in his death and his life.

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (Rom 6:4-5).

The effect of this union with Jesus is stunning and life changing. Those who believe in Jesus are forgiven, no longer condemned, fully loved, and adopted into God's family. They are set free from the condemnation of sin, walk in newness of life, filled with the personal presence of Jesus by the Spirit, and they know that everything that happens in life is a part of God's plan to make them like Jesus.

The bottom-line is freedom! Why? Because "if God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31).

...It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword...37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:33b-36, 37-39)

How are they more than conquerors? How are they free from condemnation? How are they sure that nothing can separate them? Because he was "delivered up for our transgressions and raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25).

Justification and the resurrection of Jesus are the heart of the message of the Bible. This is not trivial information.

This is only way that anyone is forgiven and brought back to God.

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