

His Resurrection, Our Justification

He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Sometimes we benefit from the work of others. Let's say your wife decided to go back to school to become a nurse. It will take years of hard work. It will not be easy, especially if she is still working full time. But she does it and she is certified as an RN. Look at all of those who benefit from her hard work. Your wife does, of course. But so will the hospital or facility that hires her. So will the community when you consider the shortage of nurses we have out there. And you and your family will benefit, too. Moms are always nurses by default as they heal our booos with a band aid and a kiss. But now she has a full nurse's knowledge when we get sick. Besides, her added income will certainly help.

Another example would be our freeways. We take them for granted. We use them all the time. But they didn't build them for you. The interstate freeway system was proposed under the Eisenhower administration in the 1950's. Because of the cold war with Russia, the military proposed an interstate freeway system in order to move trucks, tanks and missiles across the nation quickly in case the cold war turned hot. It was built for them, but we get to use them.

Easter is the same way. We are here to celebrate Jesus. He is alive and well. More than that. He is exalted above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. That is why Easter has this majestic tone; it has this "in the presence of royalty" feel to it. He is not just alive, he is our Lord and King and sitting at the right hand of God the Father.

But it isn't just about Jesus. You noticed in our text for today the first person plural pronoun, "our." All that Jesus is and does is for us. It is his resurrection, but it is our justification.

There is one thing church has done for you. It has increased your vocabulary. You will hear words like reconciliation, atonement, redemption and so on. God uses such words to show us what it means to be saved in Christ. One of the biggest and most important word is in our text for today, justification, or justify. That word is used outside the church. The justice system with its police, lawyers and judges is related to justify or justification. The justice system is there to make sure there is conformity to the law. If you are in conformity with the law, that is, not breaking it, everything is fine. But if you break it, then the justice system should come down on you.

Justice. Just. Justify. Justification. They are all related. This word has its root in the courtroom setting. Today the court will render a verdict, either "guilty" or "not guilty." In the days of Jesus they would say, "not just" or "just." So, when the judge bangs his gavel and says, "You are justified," he is saying you are not guilty and are free to go. But if he bangs his gavel and says you are not justified, then you are guilty as charged.

This courtroom scene is not just an illustration or picture. It is real. In Revelation 20 it says, ¹¹**Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.** ¹²**And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.** ¹³**The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.** There is a judgment. Everyone will be there, the rich and famous and the small, the insignificant. And death is no excuse. Even if lost at sea, the dead will stand before the throne. The books will be opened, and each will be judged according to what he or she has done. Would you like such a book read? If it mentioned how you took cookies to grandma one time, maybe. But you know it will say more than that. It will also record our many sins. As it says in the psalms, **If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?** No one, of course. We should hear God tell us, "Unjustified," "Guilty as charged."

It sounds like a done deal. Like death row inmates, we are just waiting for the Day. But it isn't over yet. We know what Jesus has to say about this. You heard it on Good Friday. He said, **It is finished.** Done. He finished God's will in his life by going to the cross. He finished the job he went there to do as he experienced hell for our sins. **It is finished,** he said. He paid for our sins.

But what does God the Father have to say about this? Imagine if you were on trial. Maybe your friends are convinced you are not guilty. That is all fine and dandy, but their opinion doesn't matter. Maybe the press is convinced you are not guilty and said so. But their opinion doesn't matter. Maybe you are convinced you are not guilty. But the only opinion that matters is the judge's. We know what Jesus has to say about our guilt or innocence. He said it is finished. But the only opinion that matters is what the judge says. What does God the Father have to say? You heard it. **He ... was raised to life for our justification.** "Justified," he says. "Not guilty," he says. Those are the best words you can ever hear, "not guilty of the sins you committed," or the most important single you will ever hear, "justified." As happy as it makes us, we are curious. It doesn't sound fair. I mean, we are guilty. It is our sin. If a judge told a guilty man to immediately go free, we would move to impeach such a judge.

But God is being absolutely fair when he declares us not guilty. He isn't releasing guilty people. He punished the guilty to the fullest extent of the law. He did, in Christ. **He was delivered over to death for our sins.** Note the first person plural pronoun, "our" sins. Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins. He received the full penalty for our sins. So God isn't letting the guilty go free. He is declaring the sinner "not guilty" because the payment for sin has been met in the death of Christ.

It is finished. So why Easter? Justification takes us from the cross where Jesus died for our sins to his tomb. When we look into that tomb, what do we find? Nothing. **He was raised to life for our justification.** God raised Jesus from the dead, not because he is his son or because he could. By raising Jesus from the dead, God was saying that he agreed with Jesus. "I agree. It is finished," God the Father said. "I accept your payment for their sins." God forgives us our sins because Jesus was delivered over to death for them. He was raised to life because God accepted his sacrifice for our sins.

Really? Not guilty of sins? Yes. But aren't Christians still sinners? Don't we still have a sinful nature? Don't we still see sin in our lives even if we try to avoid them? Yes. How can this be? Again, look to Christ. We still find sin in our lives. But as far as our status before God is concerned, we are not guilty because he was given over to death for our sins and raised for our justification. Luther had a catchy phrase to describe this. *Simul iustus et peccator*, which means, "a sinner and a saint at the same time."

If it helps, picture it like this. A woman is in a tough situation. She is crippled by high debt and owns nothing. Then a rich man meets her, falls in love with her and marries her, something like a Cinderella story. Immediately what belonged to the rich man, his money and mansions, becomes hers, and what was hers, her debt and poverty, becomes his. We the Church have nothing to offer Christ but filthy rags and a huge debt for sin. However, married to him, all we had, our debt and poverty, he takes. And what is his, his wealth and mansion, belongs to us.

It is easy to forget we are married to Christ. We do not always feel all the power and glory we would expect being married to the resurrected, immortal King of the Universe. We are still troubled by temptation. We go through the world experiencing the pains and troubles it offers. We find ourselves weighed down. Some studies suggest that about a third of our population is experiencing some sort of depression post Covid. And if one event like that affects us, how about adding all sorts of things like aging or inflation or a quarrelling family, or repeated failure or dead ends? Like Paul in Corinthians, we have the glorious message of a resurrected Savior, and yet we are still jars of clay, frail and fragile. But if we can remember that the Christ who married us is as alive today as he was on that first Easter, and that he is constantly making intercession for us before the Father, telling him, "It is finished," then we have a hope that will sustain us in any and all trouble. As C.S. wrote in his "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," it may look like the White Witch still has all the power, but "Aslan is on the move."

Or, as Martin Luther wrote, "Since Christ has taken my sins upon himself, has died for them, has suffered himself to be slain on account of my sins, they can no longer harm me; for Christ is too strong for them, they cannot keep him; he breaks forth and overpowers them, ascends into heaven, takes sin and sorrow captive, and rules there over all throughout eternity."

Today, we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But remember this. All that happened to him benefits us. His death for our sins has won a not guilty verdict or justification before God the Father. How do we know? God raised him from the dead. His resurrection and our justification is so intertwined, you can't separate the two, especially when he comes and gives the command, and the graves of believers will open in our own resurrection. Amen.