

## Salvation Belongs to the Lord (Justification – Part 1)

As Jonah says, “***Salvation belongs to the Lord***” (Jonah 2:9). From eternity past all the way to eternity future, in Christ, God is saving his people. And as we’ve seen, “salvation” is so much more than a mere confession, a walking of an aisle, a raising of a hand. YES, we must believe, YES, we must repent. But, at the end of the day, we must say with Jonah that “***salvation belongs to the Lord.***” Today, our focus turns to the subject of justification. Rom. 8:29-30 says, “**For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.**” If you are saved, you are justified. If you are a Christian, you have been made “right” with God. This means, if you are a Christian, you can stand before God with no fear of punishment, no fear of being condemned, no fear of God’s displeasure, no fear of God’s indignation, no fear of God’s wrath to ever fall upon you! How does that sound! With this in mind, I would like to delve into this doctrine we call justification. I have two sermons. Today, I want to answer the question, “Why does a person need to be justified.”

1. Why does a person need to be justified before God? This is a very important question. At the heart of the word “justify,” we find a central meaning. We get words like “just,” or “justice,” “right,” and “righteousness.” How can a man/woman be RIGHT with God? Kids, have you ever gotten into an argument with your brother or sister over who is right? (I’m right! No, I’m right!) Husbands and wives, have you ever had an argument over who is right or wrong? Of course you have! We have those arguments in families, among friendships (me and Joe over who owes who), at work, in board meetings, in neighborhoods, etc. We want to be right! The “world” wants to be on the right side of history. We all want to be right.

We understand this concept. We get it. And, when we are proven wrong, there may be certain consequences for coming up on the wrong side. For example: “*Jon, I told you to put the trampoline behind the wall before the storm blew it away and we had to buy a new net.*” Now, I was wrong for not listening to Kristen. At the end of the day, I must say to her, “*You were right.*” Now, this kind of example happens all the time. And the consequences are not good, but she probably won’t think badly about my character. And we move on, where I hopefully learn my lesson.

But, let’s go further with another kind of example. What if, as a husband, I don’t tell Kristen everything about how we spend money (on purpose) in order to hide something from her. And then, because of negligence, we go into major debt. I think we all agree that this would be wrong. It would be “unjust” for me to act in such a way. The “right” thing would have been to tell the truth. Well, let’s go further with this. What if a husband cheats on his wife and doesn’t tell her and then she finds out. We can imagine the awful consequences that will come. Recently, there was a man who got caught on national tv at a concert. And somehow or another, EVERYONE knew this was wrong.

Now, let's go even further. What if a man decides to kill someone, to take someone's life? This would be wrong, UNJUST. And if this man is found out, what will happen? He will go to court and when found guilty, he will be punished. And ideally, with any example of criminal justice, the punishments "should" fit the crime. And when we see things played out like this in our court system, we applaud the fact that some kind of "justice" has been accomplished. And as much as possible, we are satisfied. Justice is served. I believe these thoughts are foundational as creatures, as those who have been created in the image of God.

Now, let's think about justice in our relationship with God and try to answer our question: "*Why does a person need to be justified with God?*" We know the answer. Right back in the beginning, Adam and Eve walked with God, not as equals, but as his creation. And, in the beginning, they were "JUST," they were "RIGHTEOUS," before God. As their creator, God told them how to live, how to act, how to think, etc. I think we can certainly say that God gave Adam and Eve his laws. In a nutshell, He said, "*Obey Me and you will live.*" "*You will be happy.*" "*You will prosper.*" "*You will be . . . RIGHT . . . in your obedience.*" And, "*by being obedient to ME, as you have children and take care of the earth, you will spread my glory everywhere. My name will be DECLARED in all of creation because of your obedience.*" And I must say that declaring the glory of God for Adam and Eve wasn't mere obedience. This obedience stemmed from a great love for God. In other words, they did not merely follow God because He said so, but because they LOVED him and CHERISHED him and their greatest desires were FOR Him! And out of this great heart of love for their maker, they obeyed. And this was RIGHT . . . nothing between Adam and God!

So, what happens next? God placed two special trees in the midst of the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. And of this second tree, God said to Adam, "**You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die**" (Gen. 2:16-17). And then in Gen. 3 we read the story of what happens next. Both Adam & Eve together disobey the command of God and they eat of the tree that God forbid. So, what happened? The consequences of Adam's disobedience are immense, so that they spread all the way through God's creation order. Adam and Eve were cast from God's first temple, the Garden of Eden, away from his presence. They were ashamed. They were afraid. They were fearful. They were full of guilt. What they did was unrighteous . . . unjust. And all of a sudden, an impassable chasm was placed between them and God. Instead of eternal life, the only thing they had to look forward to, was eternal death.

I am SURE they thought, "*Oh, if we could just get back to the garden, get back to where we once were . . . find favor with God again!*" "*If only things could be made right again.*" But instead, at that time, I believe the only thing they could say was, "*God you are right! We are wrong! You are just and righteous! We are not!*" And though they tried their best to cover themselves with fig leaves from God, they were not successful. Nor could they ever be! NOTHING they could do to

change their position from before God! Only a sure expectation of death! ***“In the day you eat of eat, you will surely die”*** (Gen. 2:17).

Do you remember a few minutes ago when I talked about certain crimes and punishments. Well, in our courts of law, there can be punishments that do not lead to death. When someone steals, there can be retribution. When someone commits adultery, there can be reconciliation. When a husband badly manages family money, there can be help and restoration. Children, when you take your brother or sister’s toy, you can give it back and be nice again. When we commit crimes against our fellow man, there can be some kind of reconciliation and in many cases, justice performed, and relationships mended. As men and women, as creatures in God’s image, we can, and do, sin against one another. And though the consequences are great, at the end of the day, it is one unrighteous person carrying out crimes against another righteous person.

But . . . what happens when we disobey God? This is called SIN. And what does it mean to sin? Rom. 3:23 says that to sin is to ***“fall short of God’s glory.”*** Brothers and sisters when we sin against God we have broken a law that cannot be undone by any works we can do! We have fallen short of his glory! The ONLY thing that can happen is for God to carry out his justice upon us: DEATH which includes physical death, spiritual death, which is separation from the God of life, and eternal death and punishment. There is NOTHING a sinner can do to be RIGHT again. In this regard there is no hope! A finite creature has committed a crime against an infinite God. And the glory that God gave to Adam before his sin was now gone. And such is our case!

Do you remember Job? Do you remember what God said to Satan about him? He says, ***“there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?”*** (Job 1:8). At that time I believe He is the most righteous man on the earth. Does this mean Job will escape the justice of God? After all, He too is a Son of Adam, just like the rest of us. In Job 15 as his friend Eliphaz contemplates the holiness of God and how God is different from his creatures, he says, ***“Behold, God puts no trust in his holy ones, and the heavens are not pure in his sight; how much less one who is abominable and corrupt, a man who drinks injustice like water!”*** (Job 15:15-16). What about the prophet Isaiah? When he sees the holiness of God and then his own sins, he says, ***“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”*** (Is. 6:5) What about King David? He is described as a man who loves God with all his heart. But, when he considered his sins before God he says, ***“For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me”*** (Ps. 51:3-5).

Our question is not: *“How can a man be made righteous in God’s sight.”* Instead, we must ask, *“How can a sinful man be made righteous in God’s sight?”* You see, we/you have not sinned against another sinful person, another creature, we have sinned against GOD! And God cannot

just let sin go! Why? This would not be just. He cannot just say, *“you tried your best, that’s good enough. You are justified.”* (This is what the world thinks about how God. This is what the world thinks about salvation. This is what many Christians think about salvation.)

We cannot think this way! *“Oh, if I’ll just be good enough, if I just try hard enough, or if I just ask God to forgive me.”* When we think about how sinful we are, we must not merely count the multitude of our sins (which are immense), we must see that even the best of our righteous acts is still like a filthy rag in the site of God because we are sinners by nature. If we are to be saved, we must have the righteousness of God, that is, we must be just in God’s sight. If we are to be saved, we can’t merely be forgiven, we must be made righteous again. And this is a righteousness that ONLY God can give! Unless we get this truth, we cannot understand what it means to be justified! Let me make a few comments in closing

1. The only good news to be found for sinners is the mercy of God in sending his Son. This is the gospel! Listen to these verses: John 3:17-18: **“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned . . .”**

2. This means we glory in the incarnation of Christ! There must be both God and man. It cannot be merely a “perfect” man; it must be of the same righteousness of God. If our sin is against God who is eternal, then his remedy must include his righteousness, not merely the righteousness of a created “sinless” man. The cost of your salvation is of eternal value. This is why Peter can say **“the blood of Christ is precious”** (1 Pet. 1:19).

3. It follows that ONLY God can bring forth salvation! God is the author of salvation. God must be the ONE who is just AND God is the only ONE who can justify. This is why Salvation Belongs to the Lord. From before the foundations of the world, God saw that **“his own arm”** must bring forth salvation if anyone were to be saved. This is why the cross of Christ is necessary. It must be this way! ONLY the Son of God and the Son of man (incarnation) could bring forth such a salvation! There must be a “righteous” sacrifice in the place of sinners! Not merely a lamb, but the Lamb of God . . . Do you remember the words of Is. 53:11? Speaking of the Messiah to come, he says, **“Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.”**

4. This means all the other “ways” to heaven are not good enough. All “roads” do not lead to heaven. *“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). This is why John in Book of Revelation can say, *“No one was worthy”* to open the scroll. He is not worthy if he is merely a righteous man. He must also have the righteousness of God. And this righteousness must come down to us! This is the incarnation. And only through the incarnation of the Son can we be justified; saved. This is the doctrine of justification!

5. This means our constant praise must be to God who works in such ways to save sinners like you and me! I have a lot more to say next week about how we are justified and how the righteousness of God comes down to us. But for today, let's end with this: To be JUSTIFIED is to be SAVED. In Rom. 5:8-10 we read **"But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."**

Today, as Rom. 8:1 says: **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."**