

By works of the law no man will be justified in [God’s] sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. 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, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith (Rom 3:20 – 21a, 22a, 23 – 25a).

Those words from Romans chapter 3 are the clear summary of the whole Christian faith, the central and chief article. This is what makes Christianity Christianity. This is what makes the Gospel good news to humanity. Man is justified, righteous, able to stand before God and not be condemned, is deemed acceptable and pleasing, not by the law, not by what man does, but by what God promises in Jesus Christ and His blood shed for us. In chapter 4, Paul uses father Abraham to make clear that this is already the teaching of the Old Testament. Salvation is always and only by the promise of the forgiveness of sins given us by God, and received by faith.

This is the objective foundation of the Christian life. This is what Luther realized as he was directed out of himself, to cease looking inward, measuring his sincerity of heart, his thoroughness of confessing all of his sins, the holiness of his life by obedience and depriving himself, to see what God has done for him and every person already in Christ Jesus. That is the righteousness of God. He has given His own dear Son to shed His innocent blood for us, to reconcile us to Him. That Jesus did this for me is what faith lays hold of and believes. It is in this, by having Christ for us, that the Christian is saved.

That is the point where Paul then picks up in today’s epistle, from this central and saving truth: **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand”** (Rom 5:1 – 2). Because of Christ’s objective work for you, what He has done, that He is your Lord, means this is true. Peace with God, standing dead-center in the bull’s eye not of God’s wrath, but on the receiving end of God’s favor, His kindly face upon you.

We are given a glimpse of this from God’s perspective at the beginning of the Book of Job. He delights in Job, boasts in His beloved believer. But as the story of Job and as St. Paul goes on to speak of in today’s epistle, as the Canaanite woman experiences along with countless others who come to the Lord during His life and ministry, as every Christian believer comes to know, the life of a Christian, the life of those who are the righteous, beloved children of God, is not a bed of roses, is not free from suffering and pain and loss. It’s translated as “suffering,” we might understand this as “pressure,” what comes upon us and presses down that it afflicts us.

The suffering of Job is not because of God’s wrath for some sin Job has done. That is the wrong conclusion of Job’s friends. Job suffers the loss of flocks, fields, family, even his flesh comes under attack, plagued by sores, all those losses, sorrows, and pains press down upon him. Yet we are told, **“In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.”** Rather he confessed, **“The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD”** (1:21b).

St. Paul says **“we rejoice in our sufferings.”** He does not mean by that that the afflictions are the cause of rejoicing. Rather while in midst of suffering, while that is the condition at the time, because of what he has said just before, we stand, our status before God, is under His grace for us in Christ Jesus, we are at peace with Him, we ever have that joy. That is why Job confesses later, **“Though He slay me, I will hope in Him”** (Job 13:15). Job is confident in the objective truth outside of him, not affected by what Job sees or experiences, how he feels. The sure and certain reality is the favor of God.

Though at the first the Lord’s disciples spurn her, though He Himself seems to say He has not come for people like this Canaanite woman, though He calls her a dog, the woman is confident of who Jesus is, of the kind of Lord He is, and therefore is unrelenting in calling upon Him to show mercy. **“Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame.”**

All that is to teach us to ask in time of the pressing-downs of life, not “Why?” but “To what end?” Most Christians do not get a clear “Why” in this life. Job does not know that God’s delight in him, boasting even, has drawn Satan’s attention, and that God has permitted the Evil One to afflict Job for a time, but also set clear limits on what the Devil can do. All he knows is the misery and loss.

We don’t know why the Canaanite woman’s daughter came to be oppressed by a demon. We do know from other parts of Scripture that God does at times send things to press down on His people, will act so that they must go without some bodily or worldly good for a time. It is this sense in which we are to understand Scripture when it attributes “evil” to God. God does cause lack or removes some good that would normally be present. But other times, as we see with Job, God permits Satan to act. Other times, it is simply because fallen men as they live and act cannot but cause harm or dysfunction, like cutting with a dull saw.

It’s not helpful to ask “Why,” because we are not given a specific answer in each case. We are to realize, we are taught the comforting truth of “To what end.” Job and the Canaanite woman illustrate it. St. Paul explains it. Job, even as he weakens and breaks, begins to charge God with injustice, is driven to God. However painful the response she hears, however hard what she experiences presses, the Canaanite woman continues to endure, will not relent, continues to hope in Christ’s mercy for her because she recognizes who He is, and what she must bear for a time drives her to Christ all the more. And in the end, Job and the Canaanite woman are not put to shame. They are not left disappointed.

And neither will you. Whatever you bear, whatever presses down on you, you know to what end it is so because you know God’s mercy for you in Christ Jesus. That is the overarching reality, the basic truth that grounds everything. So that even in misery, sitting in dust and ashes, you fix your eyes on Jesus, the source of all joy. And as He has done for Job, for the woman of Canaan and her daughter, for St. Paul and all those countless Christian believers over the centuries, He finally delivers the hope of glory, what is promised to all those who have the guarantee of His love in Christ Jesus. Your hope shall not be put to shame, but shall be vindicated as you will see the end, you will see and know and rejoice in the why.

May God ever keep us in this faith, preserve us in this hope, and bring us to that eternal joy and glory!