

Benefits of Justification

Scripture: Romans 5:1-2

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Morning Service**

People of God: It's a picture that went viral around the world. Some of you know immediately of what I'm referring to. After Vancouver lost seventh and final game of the Stanley Cup, some of the fans rioted on the streets of Vancouver. As cars were burning, as windows were being shattered, as looting began, the police tried to gain control of the situation. They began to clear the streets. A young woman remained lying on the street, after the police passed by. A young man came to her aid and gave her a gentle kiss. And the picture of them kissing, in the midst of the riots became front-page news around the world and went viral on the Internet.

Why? What is it about that picture that is so captivating? Why has it created so much discussion? It's a picture that invites a story. Who is this couple and how did they end up on the streets with a gentle kiss in the midst of a riot? And it is the context of a riot that adds to the drama of the picture. It's a picture of love in the midst of what looks like a war zone; it's a picture of hope in the midst of a chaotic situation. To use even more biblical language, it's a picture of grace in the midst of a sin-laden event.

Our text for this morning is a picture of peace, grace, and hope in the midst of a world that can so easily degenerate into violence and chaos. In fact, the first couple of chapters in Romans explain why we should not have been surprised by what happened in the streets of Vancouver. As Paul explained, all human beings are corrupted by sin.

For some, that sinful nature is very evident—there were a few individuals in Vancouver who came prepared to riot. After all, it's not easy to put a car on fire. Some came with the necessary tools. Others didn't come with that intent, but they got caught up in the moment. And so, there was another picture of a star athlete trying to set a police car on fire. You see, sin is contagious. Our sinful nature can easily get unleashed. The riots just prove

the point of the opening chapters of Romans: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (3:23)—making us all liable to the judgment of God.

But after making that point, Paul goes on to show how God has provided a way out. That way out is being justified by faith in Jesus Christ. We are made right with God, not through obedience to the law, not through rituals like circumcision or baptism, but through what Jesus Christ has accomplished on the cross, which we appropriate through faith. And so, the opening words of chapter five summarize what Paul has taught over the previous couple of chapters: *we have been justified through faith*.

Now Paul begins to unpack the results of what this means. He answers the “so what” question. In just these two opening verses of chapter five, he mentions three benefits of being justified through faith. Benefits that touch upon our past, present, and future.

First of all, we have peace with God. Let that phrase sink in. It doesn't say we receive the peace **of** God. No, it says: we have peace **with** God. This phrase implies that at one point there was no peace between God and us. And indeed, in verse 10, we are described as once being God's enemies. That's a dangerous position to be in.

But that was the case. Humanity rebelled against the Lord. The truth of God was exchanged for a lie. The creation was worshipped instead of the Creator. The law built into the design of the creation was rejected so that wickedness spread. As a result of this rebellion, the wrath and judgment of God hangs over humanity.

But now, we have peace with God. The wrath of God has been diverted. God no longer has hostile intentions against us because of our sins. Peace now exists between God and those who place their faith in Christ.

Now peace in the biblical usage of the word is far more than just an end to hostilities. It is a positive thing. Instead of being enemies of God, we are part of God's family. Instead of worrying about the wrath of God, we have received the blessings of God. The Hebrew word for peace is shalom. Shalom describes a sense of complete well-being, a sense that all is right in the world.

To have shalom with God is to have and experience this new relationship with him. It's not just a subjective feeling, like when we say, "I feel so peaceful." It can include that but it is more than that. It is an actual change in our status before God. Once we were his enemies, now we are his friends.

This is a past action that has on going results. We have peace with God. It's something that we already have because Jesus has secured it through his death and resurrection. This state of peace does not depend upon

you or your action. It rests upon the completed work of Jesus in the past. As a result, in Christ, we have peace with God.

The second benefit of being justified by faith is described this way in verse two: *we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand*. Because we have peace with God, we no longer have to fear entering into the presence of God. Instead, we have access to him.

The word access gets its meaning from the act of being introduced into the presence of an important person, such as a king. In ancient times, you couldn't just knock uninvited on the king's door and walk right in. Instead, you had to have an appointment. When you came in, you would be escorted and then be introduced by the royal secretary to the king. Then you can carry out your business with the king. That's the scene that this word describes.

We can't just march into God's presence on our own. We need an introduction. That's what Christ has done for us. Christ introduces us into the presence of God. Because of him, we can state our concerns before the King, knowing that we will be heard.

Now Paul adds that we stand in this grace. This emphasizes that we are firmly established in this relationship with God. Since Christ has introduced us to the King, we have a permanent favorable relationship to him. It's not as if we have access to his presence one day, but not the next. Instead, we can be certain our access. It's 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days of the year.

This is a present benefit that we use every time we pray, every time we worship. We have access to God.

A third benefit in being justified through faith is found in the second half of verse two: *we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God*. The word "rejoice" has been used four times already in this letter of Romans. But in none of those cases was the word translated as rejoice. Instead, it was translated as bragging or boasting. For example, in chapter two Paul talks about the Jews bragging about the law. In these cases, the bragging or boasting was a wrong kind. It focused on possession of the law, or upon one's works. Paul rejects this kind of boasting. There is no room for boasting about keeping the law or doing good works.

But here we find a right kind of boasting. Because we have been justified by faith, we boast in the hope of the glory of God. To give this boasting a positive sense, the NIV translates it as rejoicing, even though it is not the usual word for rejoicing.

We boast in the hope of the glory of God. Let's look at that word hope. In our every day use of that word, it has a weak sense. When we say,

"I hope we might get some rain tomorrow", or "I hope I can make it to the meeting", we are often very unsure of ourselves. We don't know whether or not what we are hoping for will come to pass.

But hope in the Bible has a much stronger sense than our common usage. Hope in the Bible expresses a certainty that what has been promised will come to pass. The promise is not yet realized. But one day it will be. This hope is certain. It will come to pass.

What is the hope expressed here? Our hope is the glory of God. But what does Paul mean by the glory of God? God's glory speaks about his majesty and holiness. Humanity was called to glorify God, by worshipping and serving him. Man was also created to reflect the glory of God, since man was created in the image of God. But as Paul says in the opening chapter: *For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him...they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images.*

Now the promise is given that those who are justified will one day see the full glory of God. We will experience the full majesty of God. In addition, we ourselves will be glorified. We will reach a state of complete perfection and holiness, as Paul will explain more fully in chapter eight. This is the promise for the future. This is our hope. This is our certain expectation in which we can boast.

And so, Paul unpacks the benefits of our justification, in terms of the past, present and future. Because of the past action of Christ, we have peace with God. That means in the present we have access to God, the Creator of all things. And for the future, we have a certain hope that we will see and share in the glory of God.

And all of this is pictured before us when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. In participating in the Lord's Supper we are making the confession that we are justified by faith in Jesus. It's not our works that make us right with God. It is the work of Jesus Christ. As we take, eat and drink, we can assured once again that we have peace with God, we have access to him and we shall one day see his full glory. Let us then come to the table of the Lord with confidence believing that our salvation rests securely on the completed work of Jesus Christ. Amen.