

Christmas Joy and the Doctrine of Justification

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Romans 3:21-26

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Sermon Theme: Jesus came into this world in order to justify lost sinners. To be justified means to be declared “righteous” in God’s sight, in God’s heavenly courtroom. Justification is God’s good gift to all who will but place their faith in Him, and is indeed reason for great joy.

Three insights drawn from this passage regarding the wonderful gift of justification God has given us:

1. We All Need This Gift

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (verse 23)”

- No human being is righteous before God and therefore acceptable to God based on their own piety, their own righteousness, their own merit. Instead, because of our sin, we deserve God’s judgment.
- Now I know that for most of you, this truth is not new. In fact, it is quite familiar. Nevertheless, it is wise for us to be watchful in this Advent season so as to avoid being unaffected by that which is familiar.
- Christmas is about divine rescue and it is therefore extremely appropriate in this season for us to pause and consider “why exactly do we need to be rescued?” And the biblical reason is--- God’s holiness, our sinfulness, and the consequence of divine judgment.
- Summarize Is. 6:1-7
- Isaiah’s predicament as he beheld God’s glory, is ours prior to our conversion as well.
- Prior to our conversion---by virtue of our sinfulness and sin, we once stood guilty and condemned in the presence of the Holy One.
- To the degree we truly grasp this at a deep heart level; to the degree we truly grasp our pitiable, lamentable condition apart from Christ –it is to that same degree we will glory this Christmas Season in God’s antidote which was a manger which led to the Cross.

2. Christ Came to Give Us This Gift

[23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood..

- Here we discover a primary reason Jesus came into the world on that first Christmas: He came in order that he might one day grant the grace gift of justification to lost sinners like you and like me.

“Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus for **he will save** his people from their sins (Matt 1:20-21).”

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David **a Savior**, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11).”

“my eyes have seen **your salvation** that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples (Luke 2:30).”

- The birth narratives in Matthew and Luke repeatedly emphasize, Jesus came into the world for this purpose: to save lost sinners.
- And the rest of the New Testament points to the fact that Jesus saved in large part by securing our justification.

“Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God (Romans 5:9).”

- One cannot be saved from God’s wrath, unless he is first justified by the blood of Christ.
- God put Jesus forward as a “propitiation, by His blood (verse 25)”
- On the Cross, God punished Jesus in our place, instead of us. The Lord laid on Jesus the iniquity of us all and He thereby satisfied God's justice and simultaneously removed His wrath far from us.
- Jesus also lived the perfect life we could not live, in our place. Unlike us, Jesus perfectly obeyed God in thought, word and deed.
- In justification, at the very moment we first put our faith in Christ, God both counts our sins as imputed to Christ at the Cross AND He also counts Christ’s perfect righteousness earned through His perfect life as imputed to us. This is what theologians call double imputation.
- “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).”
- What a gift! The gift of justification is a gift that is far greater than any gift under any tree anywhere. And that gift is none other than Jesus Christ and the justified status, the right standing with God He has secured for you by His life and His death.

3. **This gift is to be received by faith**

- In the middle verse 25, we see that the gift of justification is a gift that is “to be received by faith.” And at the end of verse 26, we read -- God is “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” This gift of justification to be received by faith.
- May we not forget this Christmas Season, and anytime of the year for that matter, that we are not justified by anything we do. We are justified by as a gift by grace alone through faith alone.
- This is truly the gift that keeps on giving 24/7, every day of the year. It is the gift that keeps on giving, because we never for even a single moment of our lives are sufficiently godly to merit right standing with God. Every day we struggle with sin and still sin.

- What is to be our mindset with regards to our ongoing struggle with sin? Well in the power of the Spirit, we must endeavor, when we sin, to repent and change. That is what God commands us to do. Grace is never a license to sin.
- Yet even as we do aim to put to death our sin, we ought always to take courage in the fact that we fight our sin not as those under the wrath of God, but rather, as justified sinners.
- We fight sin, in the power of the Spirit, not as God's enemies and objects of punishment, but as those who have been declared righteous in God's sight.
- As many have found, living in the good of these truths can be a great encouragement in laying aside the sins that so easily entangle us.

Conclusion

- May we not lose sight of our justification in this busy season, but instead seek to maintain our focus. May we keep Christ and His justifying work ever before us.

Questions for Discussion/Application:

- Consider taking time to read Romans 3:21-26 out loud. What observations/insights do you have from reading the text?
- In the Advent Season, it is appropriate to focus our attention on why Jesus came into the world. One reason he came into the world was to secure our justification through his life, death and resurrection. In what ways might our familiarity with this truth tempt us to overlook it such that we don't truly rejoice in it?
- How did it affect you on Sunday to reflect on Isaiah's response to beholding the glory of the Lord (see Isaiah 6 1-7)?
- What difference do you think it could make practically in our lives if we more frequently meditated on the truth of what our spiritual condition is apart from the person and work of Jesus Christ?
- Take time to review. What does it mean to be justified in God's sight? Of what practical help is it in the life of the believer to regularly (daily) meditate and reflect on the doctrine of justification?
- How has understanding the doctrine of justification helped you practically in your own walk with Christ?
- Consider taking time to pray, thanking God that we are justified by grace alone through faith alone. Consider also asking God to help us, in this Advent Season to help us to maintain our focus on this gift of justification God has given us and thereby to rejoice.