Justification – the greatest gift ever given

Text: Romans 5:1-11

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**Scriptures:** Leviticus 16:1-16; Romans 5:1-11

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 103b, 441, 290, 277, 67

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Theme: God blesses His people with peace, honour, and joy because they have been justified by faith through the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus Christ - this enables them to rejoice in sufferings which sanctify.

Proposition: Brothers and Sisters, since we have been justified by faith, we have every reason to rejoice

**Introduction**

Most of us today are familiar with internet banking. It’s a simple way of transferring financial credit to someone else. The payee’s account increases by the amount of the credit and the payer’s account decreasing by the same amount. New technology makes the transfer of credits and debits quick and easy, but the concept of transactions like these is very old.

However, it was not financial currency which was transferred in Old Testament Israel on the Day of Atonement, but the debt of the sins of the people. On that day The High Priest would kill a goat as a sin offering for the people; the goat symbolically substituting for the people. He would also lay his hands on the head of a live goat and symbolically transfer the sins of the people of Israel to that animal which would then be sent away.

These transfers foreshadow the justification by faith which is the central teaching of our text from Romans 5. Justification is, in the words of Heidelberg Catechism LD23A60, the transfer of the credits of:

1. The perfect satisfaction of Christ
2. The righteousness of Christ and
3. The holiness of Christ

The effect of this spiritual transaction is described by the catechism in these words ‘*as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me*’. Justification is granted by God to all who have true faith in Jesus Christ. I would like to persuade you this afternoon from our text in Romans 5 that justification is the greatest gift ever given. Sometimes you may receive a gift from someone which when you open it up you find is actually a package of many gifts. Justification is like this.

Today we’re going to unpack four of the gifts within this colossal credit:

1. Peace with God
2. Standing before God
3. Glory like God
4. Suffering like Christ
5. **Peace with God**

Have you ever opened a present, undoing the wrapping only to find something which is a bit less impressive than you had hoped for? You say a polite ‘thank you’, smile faintly, but you are hugely underwhelmed. Perhaps it’s a painite crystal. In case you don’t know (I didn’t until researching this), Painite is an orange and red-brown coloured rare mineral that sells for $9,000 per gram (compared to gold @$56 per gram). Painite is exceptionally rare and extremely valuable, but very little known or understood.

The gift of peace can be a bit like that. We think of peace in the world as being a rare state when there is no war. We may think of peace in the church when there are no major conflicts or divisions. We may think of peace in our family when there are no angry words, or when everyone can get together for special occasions without throwing things at each other. We may think of peace in ourselves when we are not outwardly agitated, anxious or troubled.

These are certainly aspects of peace, but they fall far short of the fullness of the word peace (Greek: eirene) used in our text: v1 “*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, wehave* ***peace*** *with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*”. This peace mirrors the Hebrew word ‘shalom’. This rich word describes harmonious wholeness, a complete wellbeing, an abundant state of perfect health and vitality.

This peace is embodied in the person of God who, within His being, lacks nothing, is completely whole, full of life. The relationships between the persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are completely harmonious. There is no separation, no division, only perfect communion.

Is it any surprise then that when God created this universe, He made it to be a place of perfect peace with universal harmony? “*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good*” (Gen 1:31). The creation mirrored the peace of God Himself. Mankind – our first ancestors Adam and Eve – enjoyed perfect peace with God and with each other. When they rebelled against their loving Creator, then they lost this peace. Instead they experienced pain, disharmony, brokenness and hostility. The whole Creation of which they were a part then became bound to corruption (Romans 8:21).

The essence of Paradise is not a sunny beach, a deck chair, and a good book or a sumptuous meal- it is peace with God. A peace which, from the perspective of life in a broken world, surpasses all understanding (Phil 4:7). This is a precious gift that comes in the package with justification. It is a peace which has been won through war. It is a peace which, it could be said, cost God His own perfect peace within the Godhead when the harmonious, perfect loving relationship between Father and Son was severed at the cross. There at Calvary, the Son was made to be sin, and the righteous anger of God against the sin of all of God’s people was fully appeased (1 John 2:2).

This appeasing of the wrath of God, this propitiation, is expressed in the HCLD23A60 as the transfer of the credit of ‘the perfect satisfaction of Christ’. Like an internet transfer of financial credit, this transaction is instantaneous (Eph 4:5). As Paul writes to the Romans in 5v10 “*while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son*”. Where there once was hostility now there is perfect peace.

This is a great gift of God to all who trust in Jesus. It is a gift given to those who do not deserve such rich favour, in the words of HCLD23A60: “*Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments and of never having kept any of them, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it at all, out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction…of Christ*”.

Peace with God is part of the gracious ‘package’ of justification, but it is not all. In Christ, we also have standing…which brings us to our 2nd point:

1. **Standing before God**

Unless we have joint, muscle or balance difficulties, most of the time we do not think so much about standing. It’s just what you do when you are upright on your feet! It’s part of God’s physical design of the human biped. We were not made to crawl or slither along the ground like insects or snakes!.

There’s more to standing than this though, as the film adaptation of Margaret Landon’s novel ‘Anna and the King of Siam’ makes clear. (Two different versions of the ‘King and I’ have been produced. Firstly in 1956 with Yul Brynner/Deborah Kerr and then in 1999 a remake with Chow Yun Fat and Jodie Foster). In Thailand at that time, nobody was able to stand in presence of the King except Anna as long as she was lower than the sovereign.

We see this same posture of reverence and submission in Scripture: *Whenever the unclean spirits saw Him, they would fall down before Him and shout, "You are the Son of God!" (Mark 3:11).* The cleansed Samaritan leper also fell on his face at Jesus’s feet (Luke 17:16). The 24 elders in Revelation chapter 5 fall down before him who is seated on throne.

Yet listen to the introduction of an angelic messenger to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist: *And the angel answered and said to him (Zechariah), "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God; and I have been sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news. (Luke 1:19)* Gabriel was highly privileged/honoured to STAND in presence of God.

Brothers and sisters, because of our justification, this is our posture of privilege in Christ! We can enter freely enter into the throne room of God. We stand there not so much as ruled subjects (although that is who we are in Christ), but as the King’s children who stand before Him as though we were perfect.

But how can that be when we most certainly are not? How can we stand when we have ‘grievously sinned against all God’s commandments’? How can that we are upright when we have never kept any of them perfectly? How can that be that we are so privileged when we are still inclined to all evil?

Only because of the transfer of the credit of Christ’s righteousness to us.

1. Jesus who perfectly obeyed the Law at all times all through His life on this earth.
2. Jesus who grew up in wisdom and stature, in favour with God and men (Lk 2:52).
3. Jesus, tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:15).

The Heidelberg Catechism describes this spiritual transfer in these words “*out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me the perfect… righteousness of Christ*”. Brother and sister, the righteousness of Christ is granted and credited to you as if you had never sinned nor been a sinner. Paul makes the connection between our standing in the righteousness of Christ and faith as writes to the Romans: v2 “*Through him we have also obtained access by faithinto this grace in which we stand*”.

Faith is not the source of our righteousness. The source is Christ Himself. It is HIS righteousness. Faith is the instrument, the “hand of the soul”, the God-given means by which we are justified, as with Abraham who believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6). We stand in the righteousness of Christ and therefore we can draw near with confidence to the throne of grace (Heb 4:16), not being hesitant because our conscience accuses us of having sinned.

Standing before God is part of the gracious ‘package’ of justification, but it is not all! In Christ, we also have glory like God to look forward to...which brings us to our 3rd point:

1. **Glory like God**

We can all customize the ‘wallpaper’ on our electronic devices. The images we choose say something about what we enjoy looking at. It will not surprise you to know that I generally have pictures of high mountains on my computer ‘wallpaper’. The majesty and grandeur of lofty peaks, the cleanness of the snow leading up the summit with the brightness of sunlight reflecting on slopes and ridges soothes my soul and lifts my spirit in a Godward direction. Why? Because majestic mountains are glorious and reflect the glory of their Maker.

So, it was with Adam and Eve, the pinnacles of God’s very good Creation. They were uniquely glorious creatures made in God’s image. They reflected the majesty, the authority, the weightiness, the grandeur of their Maker, that is until they fell. In writing about Jesus Christ, the perfect man, the ‘second Adam’ John says in his gospel: “*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth*” (John 1:14). Jesus Christ has the glory of God, He always has.

As part of the fullness of the ‘package’ of gifts within justification is the holiness of Christ. We receive glory like God’s glory. The glory of the perfect man. HCLD23A60 puts it like this: “*Out of sheer grace, God grants and credits to me…the holiness of Christ*”. God looks upon us as though we already possessed the pure and holy character of Christ – that is also why we have standing before Him.

God treats us as ‘holy ones’, ‘set apart ones’, saints. He calls us holy and beloved (Col 3:12) and then calls us out of thankfulness for our justification in Christ to live holy lives. As justified sinners God declares us to be holy, crediting the holiness of Christ to us. He also enables us to progressively become more and more holy through the ongoing process of sanctification. When Paul writes in v2 “*and werejoicein hope of the glory of God*”. He is expressing the sure hope that we have that we will one day be fully sanctified when we pass through death. Then we will be glorified – fully reflecting the glory of God as perfect human beings.

We can rejoice because our justification (which is complete now for all who believe in Christ Jesus) secures us, and not our sanctification (which is always incomplete in this life). It is vital to understand this the right way round. We are not justified by becoming more holy. We are justified so that we can (as part of the ‘package’ of gifts which God grants and credits to us out of sheer grace) be sanctified. To put this another way; sanctification is the evidence of our justification, not its cause. James expresses this truth in these words: “*So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*” (James 2:17)

The progressive glory of God, that is Christ-like character, in us is often not produced in times of ease, but usually much more in periods of trial, which brings us to our final point:

1. **Suffering like Christ**

Imagine that you receive a package from someone who loves you deeply and knows not only what you want, but more importantly what you need. In the gift package there might be some food, drink, clothing, and a host of other good items. Then you find something amongst everything else which you did not expect. It’s a tourniquet (a strong strip of cloth used to tie tightly around an injured arm or leg to stop it bleeding). That’s weird you think, but you store this items in a small first aid kit you have because you can’t think of anywhere else to put it and you don’t want to offend the giver by throwing it away.

Suffering, like Christ’s satisfaction, righteousness and holiness, is part of the ‘package’ which God grants and credits to those He loves. Suffering is connected to justification which, like a tourniquet, is not what you’d usually expect in a gift. Adversity and difficulty are not mentioned in relation to justification in HCLD23, but they are in our text from Romans 5. Paul writes: (v2b-3) “*werejoicein hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us*”.

The word used here by Paul for “sufferings’ conveys the idea of severe constriction, of narrowing, of pressing together. It was used in Bible times of squeezing olives or grapes in a press to extract oil or juice. In New Testament usage it also conveys idea of great emotional and or spiritual stress - resulting from both external and internal pressures. Paul Himself was a man who put great pressure on the church. At that time he was the cause of the suffering of many who were justified by Christ.

When Jesus called out to him on the road to Damascus, saying: "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*" (Acts 9:4) He was saying to Paul ‘when you cause my church to suffer, you persecute me!’.

Between the 1st&2nd comings of Christ, our Lord continues to suffer in the members of His body here on earth. This is what Paul means when he writes to the Colossians: **“***Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church*” (Col 1:24). The justified suffer specifically because they are the justified. As we suffer for the sake of Christ and His Body, the church, we can do so rejoicing because

* Christ is using our willing suffering to build His church.
* Christ is honoured and glorified are joined to Him in suffering.
* We may then know more of the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings.

God grants that we may share in the sufferings of Christ (2 Cor 1:5; 2 Cor 1:7; Phil 3:10; 2 Tit 1:8; 2 Tim 2:3; 1 Pet 4:13) not in any way to justify ourselves, but to live as Christ’s body on this earth, bearing His name. Justification opens the way for us to understand suffering in a radically different way from those who do not know Christ.

Perhaps you’re wondering about tourniquet? Imagine that the wise giver of the gift package knew that the person He loves would need it one day. That person happened to throw her first aid kit into the car for a journey one day when she was going for a bush walk. On the way, the vehicle skidded on some ice, the resulting accident led severe bleeding from one of her legs. Without the tourniquet she would have died. As her husband was tightening the pressure on her upper leg and she felt the intense pain, she was thankful for the weird gift she had received long before.

Likewise, it can take a long time in life to understand and be thankful for the unexpected gift of suffering. A gift which produces endurance, character and then hope in the Lord our God.

Next time you are transferring funds through internet banking think about justification. That is God’s granting and crediting of the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ to those He loves, together with suffering for Christ’s sake in which we are able to rejoice.

AMEN.