

Easter Sunday 16/4/17
Bible Readings: Luke 24.1-12 & 36-49 - Romans 4.23 - 5.11
Sermon: John Malcolm

“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” (Romans 4:25)

Today is a day of joyful celebration for Christians all around the world.

And I hope it is a day of joy for you.

I hope this is a day that inspires you to songs of praise.

I hope it is a day that encourages you in your faith.

I hope it is a day that stirs you up spiritually, bringing you comfort and challenge.

It is comforting because it reminds us that our beloved Jesus is alive and it is challenging because the resurrection impacts our lives and changed the direction of human history.

Part of our joy on this day is because Jesus’ resurrection has major implications for us in this life and in the life to come.

As the first to rise from the dead, Jesus opens the way for us to rise from death and have eternal life.

The resurrection either makes or breaks Christianity.

If Jesus is not risen

His teachings are hollow

His deeds were deceptive

His promises are empty

The Apostle Paul said if Jesus is not risen,

Our preaching is useless, and so is our faith

We are found to be liars and our faith is futile,

We are to be pitied more than all men because we are still in our sin and have no hope of eternal life.

Christianity is not Christianity without the resurrection.

Christianity does not offer a cohesive and compelling worldview without the resurrection of Jesus.

Christianity is powerless without the resurrection of Jesus.

However, If Jesus is risen – then game over, he is the winner, the conqueror of death, the eternal Son of God, giver of life.

No one else has ever risen from the dead – no one at all, not even close!

Jesus is the one and only.

He is heaven’s champion – the undefeated champion.

By the resurrection Jesus is vindicated, proven right in all his claims.

By the resurrection all Jesus’ teaching is validated, confirmed to be true.

Only the resurrection of Jesus can adequately explain

The change in heart in the disciples and their willingness to suffer death for their faith,

The birth of the church, which grew and spread so rapidly,

And the power at work in the church, which Paul says is like *the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead* (Eph 1:19–20)

The resurrection of Jesus has many implications – this morning I want to highlight just one of them.

Jesus ... was raised to life for our justification.” (Romans 4:25)

I want to be clear at the outset, this justification linked to Jesus’ resurrection, applies only to people who put their faith in what Jesus has done.

As we heard in our reading *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,”* (Romans 5:1)

Justification comes through faith in Jesus and this can be you if you will believe in him and trust in him to save you.

But if it is not yet you, don't tune out, rather listen and consider it, because this could be the most important thing you ever discover.

When we consider this verse, perhaps the first question to arise is for us, why do I need to be justified?

We might ask, Am I not fine as I am, okay without this justification by faith?

The human problem, **is not based on how we see ourselves**, not even on how others see us, **but on how God sees us.**

We find it quite easy to justify ourselves by making excuses for our actions and making them appear to be reasonable in our own eyes.

We might try to justify ourselves to others, giving mitigating circumstances, excuses or comparing it with something others might have done saying *at least I'm not that bad.*

While this type of justification might work in our own eyes, and maybe even in the eyes of others, it doesn't work with God.

God sees past our self-justification and sees the heart. God sees what is really going on within our minds and even if we refuse to see it ourselves, God sees.

Using the word justification, Paul is using a legal term which brings to mind a courtroom in which a person stands accused of wrongdoing and a judge is there to bring a verdict.

As you read Paul's letter to the Christians at Rome you find references to God's laws and gain a picture of a heavenly court in which God is the judge and we, humanity, are the accused.

Earlier in this letter Paul had said, *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"* (Romans 3:23).

His argument is that everyone has broken the laws of God and so everyone is guilty, no one is justified.

Therefore, everyone needs the justification that Jesus offers through the resurrection.

To try to explain what justified means, and playing on the English words we sometimes say it means *just-as-if-I'd never sinned.*

Justified means declared righteous.

It is a technical legal term used in ancient courts where not only are the charges not proven, as if a hung jury could not determine your guilt or innocence, but you are acquitted, declared innocent from the charges against you.

And more than this it restores your standing and reputation in God's eyes.

This means that while I am a person who is guilty of doing wrong in God's sight, because Jesus is risen God now credits me with Christ's good standing and see me as justified – just as if I'd never sinned.

We get a better understanding of this when we look at the Psalms and read that God *... "does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities ... as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."* (Psalm 103:10–12)

Being justified means that God removes any and every trace of our guilt from his presence. It becomes so far removed and spiritually separated from us that it is gone forever.

God says to us, *"I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more."* (Isaiah 43:25)

Sadly in our society, when a person is accused, even if they are found innocent from a legal point of view, often their reputation is damaged and some people will still have doubts about their innocence.

In our society, we have a proverb which says, *there is no smoke without fire* meaning if a person is accused of something there is probably a good valid reason for it even if it is not obvious and can't be proven.

And another which says, *mud sticks*, meaning a person can't be totally free of an accusation once it has been made.

We see this inference of guilt being raised this week in the story of **Dr David Dao**. Many of you will have seen the video of him being dragged from his seat on an aeroplane when the airline had overbooked the flight and he refused to leave saying he needed to get home because he had patients to treat the following day.

Being in the headlines has put a spotlight on him and it has uncovered some criminal activity in his past that is unrelated to his being asked to leave the plane. News outlets have been criticised for reporting it. One article says, *Reporting this about the man United assaulted are not relevant to what happened & suggest a misunderstanding of the US legal system.*

While there is no connection between these things, many people will make some connection in their minds and assume there is more to this than meets the eye or that he somehow deserved such treatment by the airline.

But our justification means that in God's eyes we are seen as completely innocent with no residue of accusation or guilt to leave a stain in our lives.

Because Jesus is risen and that means we are justified, God forgets our sin.

The mud of our sin doesn't stick, because God washes it away. As the Psalmist wrote, *"Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow."* (Psalm 51:7)

Justification is accompanied by cleansing which means no mud, no sin, no hint of anything bad can cling to us.

Paul reminds us of this when he quotes from the Psalms saying, *"Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered."* (Romans 4:7)

These different images of how God deals with our sin; removed as far away, forgotten, washed whiter than snow and covered - each add and give weight to the idea that in Jesus, through his death and resurrection our sins are gone and we are justified, freely, forever.

What difference does this make to us that Jesus was raised to life for our justification." (Romans 4:25)

It takes the weight off our shoulders of trying to justify ourselves, something that we could not do anyway.

Jesus has done for us what we could not do for ourselves.

It brings us into a right relationship with God our heavenly Father, restoring us to God and God to us.

It is part and parcel of being made children of God with all the other benefits of righteousness, sanctification, forgiveness of sin, heirs with Jesus Christ, having eternal life.

Justification by faith is a significant piece of the picture of God's plan of salvation.

All this is accomplished, assured, signed, sealed, and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus.

I will draw two things from this:

Firstly, if you have not yet put your faith in Jesus, then I encourage you to do so.

At the very least consider this with an open heart and mind. Read the Gospels, and examine Jesus life, and see all the evidence pointing towards the truth of who he is and what he has accomplished for us.

Talk to Christians and listen to their experience of Jesus.

Jesus freely offers you a place in his family, forgiveness of sin and life eternal.

Easter Sunday is a great time to accept his gracious invitation and to ask Jesus to be your Lord and Saviour.

You can do this with a simple prayer, confessing your sin and repenting of it, asking for God's forgiveness, and accepting Jesus as your saviour and Lord. (If you do this, or would like help understanding it, then speak to me, Je Cheol or a Christian friend).

Secondly, to those who have already placed their faith in Jesus – I invite you to look again at your life and relationship with him.

Consider how things are going in your walk with God.

Do what it takes to draw nearer to him. Take his hand and walk closely with him.

Commit yourself to his service and his will.

Go deeper in your faith.

Explore all the benefits Christ has won for us.

And having been justified, with all that infers, freely use every good gift we have received from God to his glory and honour.

Jesus is risen from the dead.

He is ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus will return in glory, the dead shall be raised, and we will reign with him eternally. Amen