

Justified

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning, everyone. So lovely to see you. Jackson, buddy. There, there he is. Thank you.

And on behalf of us all, know how encouraging that was for all of us to hear what God's done in your life. And know how humbling it was for me, because I almost feel like I'm standing up here and saying, kind of, yeah, what he said.

But we're going to get into Acts 13. Here's what I want you to do, or I want to do rather. I want to make a beeline with your Bibles open. And I want to show you the one word that's right at the heart of our passage today.

And it's the one word, I think, that's one of the most important of the Bible. And so to get this one word is to get the good news that's at the heart of Christianity.

You'll see it in verse 39 if you come with me. Justified. Big words. Let me break it down for us, okay? And here's why whoever you are here today, all of us should care about this word.

[1 : 0 6] Because it's a word that transports us to the very courtroom of our creator. And it's a word that pronounces that guilty human beings like us can be forgiven and be made right with the God who made us.

That's what it is to be justified. It's to be pronounced right with him. And so the question we've got to ask is how do we get justified, right?

Here's how I used to think it worked. See if this connects. My little girl Grace and I, we went to the Commonwealth pool a few months ago. So Tuesday afternoon, we've got 20 minutes to kill before her swimming lesson starts.

And so we go at the stand, which you can see in the picture there. And we start watching what's going on, in her words, in the big pool. Okay, so we're watching the big pool.

And as it turns out, in a Tuesday afternoon, the Scottish highboard diving team are doing their thing. Okay, apparently they do this every Tuesday afternoon.

[2 : 1 5] The two of us are watching this and we're absolutely gripped by it. So we watch them all go up one by one. We watch them go up and up and up, depending how brave they are. You can see the height of it.

Watch them go up and then we watch them come down. And we watch as every single one of them would hit the water. We'd watch as every single one of them would make the splash and resurface again. We'd watch as every single one of them would make the splash rise and take off their goggles.

And we'd watch as every single one of them would do that process and look in the one place, the same place. Do you know what they were looking? They were looking at the judges, right?

And the judges were there. They would hold up the scores. They would look at one another, give each other a nod. Seven, eight, six. One dude got a three, which I thought was brutal.

But what are they longing to see? They're longing to see the perfect ten. It's what they live for. It's what they do. Looking at the judge. Tell me I was good enough.

[3 : 21] Tell me I made it. Tell me I earned it. Seeing the score. And that demoralizing feeling that they hadn't hit it. Do you know what?

That's exactly how I used to think it worked with God, the creator. It's one of the ways the Bible describes sin in our human hearts. Falling short of the holiness of this God.

I was living my life, asking the question, am I good enough? Trying to be a good person. Is he pleased with me? Maybe if I bring my religious A game, then he'll love me. But realizing then the state of my heart and my inability to obey and coming away devastated with that crushing feeling that I'm never going to measure up.

Sound familiar? Like I said, we naturally think, isn't it, in our world that tells us that we need to work our way up.

To whatever it is we're trying to do. So I used to think this word justified work. Summing it up, if I achieved, then I would belong.

[4 : 34] It's exactly what Jackson was saying, wasn't it, in his story. Achieve to belong. Question, I wonder, how do you think it works here today? How do you think it works?

Do you know why you're chewing on it? Let me take you to this passage and these people in it. Let me show you how many of them think it works. Okay, so we're back with Paul and Barnabas, verse 13.

In the story of this book of Acts, which has been the story of the growth of the early church. As Jesus, the risen Jesus, continues to move in the world.

Paul and Barnabas, verse 13. They've sailed from Cyprus and they've landed in this place called Perga. So in terms of geography, where we are now, you can think of it as like modern day Turkey.

Right? And from there, when they land in Perga, they make their way inland to this city called Pisidian Antioch. So in terms of geography of modern day Turkey, in terms of biblical history, we've now stepped into the region in this day that's known as Galatia.

[5 : 40] And so in terms of understanding our Bibles and how they're put together, we've got to understand that this is the background for the book in our Bibles called Galatians. And you'll see a lot of the themes that are coming up this morning.

You'll track with them as Paul writes his letter to the people who become Christians in this region. And so even though this is a Gentile place, Pisidian Antioch, Gentile, i.e. non-Jewish.

It's a non-Jewish city. Do you see in the text how they find their way? They make their way to a local synagogue. Right? So this is just a place where the local Jews, they meet.

And you kind of get a flavor here of what goes on on the Sabbath when they meet together. They read from the Old Testament. You see it?

Verse 15, chapter 13, they read from the Old Testament. And then what they likely do is they just invite someone to bring some thoughts. Okay? So how do these people think that they are justified?

[6 : 45] Verse 39. By keeping the law of Moses. Right? You can read there the keeping of the Ten Commandments and all the additional laws which kind of orbit round about.

So to a Jewish mind, to behave is to be a sign, a sure way of knowing that you are within the circle of God's grace.

That's how they think they are justified. The keeping of the law of Moses. And from how they think it works, here's how Paul has come to see that it works.

So this is my thing back to the diving board. I thought, I wonder if you think this morning, the key word is achieve. People in this passage, what do they think the key word is? Behave. Paul says, believe.

Believe. Now before we think it's gone all Oprah Winfrey on us, right? Student motivational poster. See the crux of his message at verse 38.

[7 : 51] How can you and I be right with God? How can any human being be right with a holy God one way? Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus.

Two of the most sweetest words I think we can hope to ever hear. Through Jesus. Not through you. Not by trying harder.

Not by doing things. Through Jesus. Let those words just wash over you this morning. Through Jesus is the forgiveness of sins that's proclaimed to you.

Through him. Everyone who believes is set free from every sin. A justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.

Through Jesus. You remember one thing from this? Probably remember the diving board, right? Remember this. Through Jesus. Through him. So here's a guy who's the top of the class Jew.

[8 : 58] That's Paul. Whose moral record, whose upstanding and active religious life would put all of us to shame. Would take all of us to task. Take all of us to town and back again. And yet what has he come to see?

This is not how he would get right with God. This is not how any of us will get right with God. Here's a man in the first century whose words were echoed by Mumford and Sons in the 21st century.

Writing, singing, It seems that all my bridges have been burnt. But you say that's exactly how this grace thing works. You see, grace, the message of grace is about to hit Galatia.

How are we justified? One way through faith in this Jesus. I love verse 15. What they say? Brothers, if any of you has anything to say, please speak.

Now, you're a preacher. This is a free hit. This is an open goal. This is a gift horse in the mouth. You can pick your phrase. And you kind of think, I bet you kind of wish you hadn't asked that for Paul.

[10 : 06] Paul, do you want to say something? What does he say? Give me the mic. Right? Three stops in his sermon. And this is Paul's first ever sermon on Gentile Saul. I think that's why it's quite significant here.

It's almost as if, look at this point in the narrative, is saying this is the sermon. This is the message that did the rounds in Galatia. This is what Paul was saying.

It's significant. And it's almost as if he invites all those who are in the synagogue listening in to take their seats as he takes them on an open bus tour of the Bible story. Right? You ever done one of those things in Edinburgh?

Open bus tour. You sit there. What does the tour guide do? Just takes you through the stops. Here's what you see. Right? Here's what's going on. Paul's first ever sermon. The sign above the first stop reads promise.

Verse 23. Come with me. Promise. You see, right at the beginning of the Bible story, Adam and Eve, they sin in the Garden of Eden. They disobey God's word.

[11 : 05] It's almost as if you could read there that they become unjustified in this God's sight. Death and sin reigns among humanity. But God makes a promise right there in Genesis 3.

Out of an overflow of who he is, stemming from his perfect justice and love, he makes a promise. He commits himself that he will not leave his people in that predicament.

He will send a saviour. And Israel's story is God rescues them and chooses them for himself. It's the story of how through the ages, through them, God has raised up a saviour for his people.

Right? The one who will usher in God's blessing, not just for the Jews who will believe, but for anyone in the world who believes. God makes a promise.

And the bus moves on. The sign above stop number two reads fulfilled. Right? Verse 27. What God, and this is great, by the way, when I hear, when I say verses and your heads go down, love it.

[12 : 16] Love it. Verse 27. Fulfilled. Paul's saying what God said he would do, the promise he made. He's carried it out. He's done it. He's done it. You're still waiting on it, but I'm telling you, he's done it.

What God said he would do, he's done it. The promise you see is it waves, weaves its way through the Old Testament. It's almost as if at this point in time, when Jesus comes, when Jesus dies, when Jesus rises, he steps into the shoes of that promise.

He is the fulfillment of everything that God said he would do. And Paul is saying, you know that story, you know the, the Old Testament, that you read every week in this synagogue.

Do you see, will you see, I'm pleading that you will see, that this story has been leading up to the coming of Jesus. And his death and his resurrection.

I've got a weird obsession with at the minute on social media. Domino rallies. You ever watch that domino rally? Love those things. I think it just appeals to my sense of order and fulfill.

[13 : 23] You know what happens? You're just watching it and one person at the top, he's just flicking the first domino. And it just goes round and round and round and round and round. It's kind of like, if you remember, what was that program called? Mousetrap, that program, that board game called Mousetrap, if some of you remember that.

It's that kind of thing, isn't it? Disorder. This is leading somewhere. Someone flicks the first one, you watch the whole thing topple over. I think that's kind of what Paul's saying here. Once you realize who Jesus is, once you've savored his grace, once you've seen him in action, the Old Testament story, reading it becomes like watching one big domino rally.

The promise. Jesus. Tracing God's promise all the way through and realizing that it was climaxing the fulfillment in him.

Though he was innocent. Here's what Paul's saying. Though he was innocent. Verse 28. He was crucified on a cross. The law keeper died in the place of law breakers.

And though he was verifiably dead, he was taken down from that cross, put in a tomb, and God raised him. Verifiably dead. Verifiably alive through the eyewitnesses.

[14 : 36] And you see that word raised, it appears four times in quick succession in the text there. Paul underscoring the fact that Jesus was raised. Jesus was raised.

Jesus was raised. He was raised. God's way of showing the world that the price has been paid, that Jesus' mission has happened.

It's kind of like we had the experience of the night, going to a restaurant, Alex and I, coming to pay with our cards, because who carries cash anymore? But you get that weird thing, don't you, where you scan your card, and it's not instant.

It takes about five seconds, doesn't it, before putting your card in, and the receipt coming out. You have that awkward five seconds where the waiter's looking at you thinking, are you trying to pull a fast one?

And you're not. But you have to wait until the receipt. And that's what the resurrection is. The receipt that shows what Jesus did on the cross. The price of our sin that he took, price of our past, present, future sins, has been paid.

[15 : 40] It's gone through. And having raised him, fulfilling everything that Psalm 2 is talking about, and that's why Paul quotes it there at verse 32, God seated him at the position of all power and authority, in the place of power, and said, that's my son.

That's my king. And I have put him, in the words of Psalm 2, I have put him on my holy hill. And nothing is toppling him from that throne, because what he did, who he is, he accomplished it.

That's my king. You see, God's view of Jesus. You want to know what it is? Look at the resurrection. That's my son. That's him. That's what he did. Signed above, stop three, reads, Proclaimed.

Verse 38. Really quickly, Paul's just saying, this news, the promise, the fulfillment, who Jesus is, this is the message that's going global.

Come and take it. Come and live in it. This is what Jesus has done for you. What you could not do on your own, Jesus has done. There's three stops in the sermon.

[17 : 04] Luke tells us there's two reactions to his sermon. Verse 44. A week goes by, do you see in the text, since Paul went public, with this message.

I take it what he was, what he was saying. Remember, this is in the synagogue. He says, I take it what he was saying, is doing the rounds now, in Pisidia and Antioch, right? Growing up in Glasgow, had this phrase, kind of talk of the steamy.

People working in steam rooms, and just, it was the gossip mill, and word got around really quickly. I think this is the kind of thing going on here, talk of the office, that kind of thing. The whole city gathered to hear it, the next Sabbath.

Do you see? Which I take it as Luke's, hyperbolic way of saying, do you know what? It felt like everyone was there. Everyone was there. Why were they there? They were there to hear the word of the Lord.

And that's what you need, whoever you are here today. This is what you need. You need to hear the word of the Lord. Okay? Do you see how Luke pulls out, to the word of the Lord, he pulls out two reactions.

[18 : 07] Now all the way through Acts, we've seen hunger and hostility, we've seen riot and revival. It goes slightly deeper here, to the heart level. What's going on?

Captured by the two J's in this passage. Here's the first one, verse 45. Jealousy. And it comes from the Jews, as they see what God is doing through Paul.

As they see that people are actually believing this stuff. How does that manifest itself? They heaped abuse, not just on the message, but on the messenger.

And verse 50, they stir up people to riot against Paul and Barnabas, and they expel them from the city. It just means they booted them out, I think. Jealousy in the heart.

I want what you've got. I don't like what you're getting. It's a hideous thing in the human heart. And it will eat us alive if we let it live in there.

[19 : 14] Jealousy. Contrasted with the other J. Verse 52. I take it the overflow of a heart that's greeted the news of this Jesus.

And what he's done for us. Joy. Joy. Joy. Which is, I take it, the settled state of a soul that regardless of whether we're in one of those hard seasons of life.

And listen, I know Mother's Day today for many of us here is not easy. Many, many levels. The pain you might feel about your mum who you've lost. The pain, Fraser said, you might feel that, mother, you're estranged from.

All sorts of reasons that today could be incredibly painful. The hard seasons of life where we can't bring ourselves to get out of bed in the morning, feeling the weight of the world on our shoulders.

Or whether we're in one of those high seasons of life where there's a spring in our step. I take it joy in the heart of someone who's responded to this message of Jesus is a settled state of the soul which delights in the truth that whether I'm in a great place or a hard place, because of who Jesus is and because of where Jesus is for me, it's a joy that no one can snatch away.

[20 : 42] You know, one of my favourite things to do, favourite things, is to read the Gospels. And if you haven't done that today, get in there. Get in there.

Meet this Jesus. To read about him in the Gospels. To see his heart for people. And to say to myself, that Jesus is still the same for me. And I'm adopted into God's family, not because of what I've done, but because of what he's done for me.

And in light of that, I take it the Holy Spirit that Luke tells us accompanied this joy. The work of the Spirit in the child of God that says, births in us that desire that wants to say, because of what he's done for me, I want to give my all to him.

I want to worship him. I want to live for him. It's exactly what Jackson was saying this morning, wasn't it? That's grace. And I take it that who brings knowledge of that? It's the Holy Spirit.

Do you know what I've never seen before this week? If you want to get into Galatians, the letter of Galatians at the end, where did Paul end in chapter 5? The fruit of the Spirit. How will you know when it is the fruit of the flesh, our earthly desires, our worldly desires, how will you know the Holy Spirit's at work in our lives?

[21 : 59] What are the two things that he contrasts in the list? The work of the flesh? Jealousy. And yet the work of the Spirit? Joy.

And from two reactions to his sermon, let me just bring it home with one plea from his sermon. Verse 43. What do they say to those who did believe?

They talked with them and urged them to continue, not trying harder, to continue in the grace of God. So Jackson, buddy, got you there.

Never move on from this grace. Who this Jesus is. Don't be thinking like the divers at the Commonwealth pool, that your relationship with your Creator is somehow dependent, conditional on what you can achieve, how you're performing.

That your relationship with Creator is conditional. Did I get it right? Did I do enough? Never go back to the Old Testament law thinking that somehow if you could bring your religious A game, if I follow the rules, I'm in the good books of this God.

[23 : 04] Know that in Jesus it's not about your achievements, it's not about your behavior. Know that in Jesus, the Jesus who's loved you since before you were born, the Jesus, and you can take it straight out of this passage, the Father who appointed you for eternal life, verse 48, this Jesus has died for you and in him you are justified, you are adopted by this Heavenly Father.

So never move on from this grace. Do you know what? I'm finished with this. This Jesus, what is he never going to see? He's never going to see decay.

He will always be this Jesus for us and no one's going to topple him for his throne. This Holy One, God's Holy One, will never see decay.

You know what I love? Here's my favorite stories I heard this week. We'll finish with this. But a man called David Hume. Okay, David Hume was one of Scotland's leading humanist thinkers.

He was active during the Enlightenment era in our, I guess it was the West, but in our country in particular, skeptical about the things of God, confident that given enough time, belief in any kind of God would just fizzle out.

[24 : 19] And he died in a house in Edinburgh in the year 1776 and it's widely believed that 30 or so years later in that precise house where David Hume died, that the Scottish Bible Society, an organization that has as its very aim to get the word of God out there across the world, same house Scottish Bible Society had its first ever meeting.

Why? Because this Jesus is never going to see decay and he's risen and he's ruling and he's reigning and no one's going to topple him from his throne.

He's building his church and God has said that this king, the king who's loved you, the king who's known you before the foundation of the world, this king will live forever. It's exactly what Jackson said, wasn't it?

We've heard the testimony of someone 2,000 or so years later after this was written, we've heard verse 52, the testimony of a disciple who's filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

You know, there's some sermons that you finish, you're aware that you're writing and you're very aware that it's about what we should do, how we should respond. This sermon today, I take it, should leave us just in awe of who Jesus is, what he's done for us.

[25 : 38] So here's what I want to do in the kind of going with the grain of what we've looked at this morning. I want us just to take a minute, whoever you are here today, however you respond to this word this morning, why don't you just take a minute and take stock of who Jesus is and then we'll wrap up our time together.

How do we do that and then we'll pray. So Paul would write in the letter of the Galatians, the life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

I do not set aside the grace of God for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing. And so Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the Jesus who loved us and who gave himself for us.

And I pray that your Holy Spirit moving amongst us today would bring a fresh realisation of that truth to our hearts, to those who are doubting, to those who are hurting, to those who are scarred, to those who are feeling weighed down by their sin.

May a fresh knowledge of this Jesus come to our hearts and to our minds. Father, I pray, we thank you for this morning, for the celebration of the life that Jesus gives. Be with us now, Heavenly Father, as we close our time.

[27 : 09] In Jesus' name, Amen.