

Sunday School Lesson for July 25, 2021

“Justification Through Faith”

Background Scripture: Romans 5:1-11

We are justified with God through the death of Jesus. Being right with God brings us peace, grace, joy, and love. And above all, it means we no longer have to fear the wrath of God against sin. Our sin has been forgiven in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Today’s lesson tells the story of God’s loving us so much that He acted to save us from an eternal death that we deserve. The apostle Paul was involved in several great travel adventures, the last of which was his trip to Rome for a hearing before the emperor. The book of Acts ends with Paul awaiting this trial (Acts 28:30, 31). Rome was a destination he had desired for many years (Romans 1:13). Paul had spent several months in Greece toward the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:2, 3). There, probably while in the city of Corinth, he wrote to the church in Rome in AD 57 or 58. Included in the letter are the apostle’s understanding of the Old Testament background for the Christian message, the nature of Christian salvation based on the atoning death of Christ, the centrality of faith as the only path for human salvation, the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the plan of God, and several other matters. Paul quoted Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17 to set the tone for the entire book: “the just shall live by faith.” This means that faith, complete trust in God, is the only way that life may be found. It cannot be earned by obedience, although obedience is important. It is not inherited by ancestry, although this is not unimportant (see Romans 3:1, 2; 9:4, 5). True life, eternal life, the life of salvation, is only found in trusting God to save us. Abraham, the great patriarch of the Jews, was justified by faith (Romans 4:3, quoting Genesis 15:6). Thus the idea of faith in God as the core element of one’s life is not a Christian innovation. Faith is to be the foundation of our relationship with God. This was intended as

central in the pre-Israel period (Abraham), in the nation of Israel itself (Habakkuk), and in the church.

The word rejoice is the key to Romans 5. Paul develops this theme of rejoicing in three stages: 1 – we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:1-2). 2 - we rejoice in sufferings – (Romans 5:3-10) and stage 3 we rejoice in god our Friend (Romans 5:11-21).

In verse 1 the cause for rejoicing is that we have been justified through faith, which brings us peace with God. Peace has the meaning of “satisfaction,” or “payment for an offense.” Leviticus 24:21a states that a person who kills another’s animal must replace it. According to Paul, some sort of restitution must occur to have peace with God. That restitution happens through our Lord Jesus Christ (compare Ephesians 2:14).

In verse 2 the word access gives a picture of being in the presence of God (Ephesians 2:18; 3:12). Access to God was limited under the Law of Moses. Direct access to God’s presence in the temple’s Holy of Holies was reserved for the high priest, and he could claim this access but once a year (Leviticus 16; Hebrews 9:7). But the veil of the temple has been torn open through the death of Christ (Matthew 27:51; Hebrews 10:19, 20), and access is now available to all. This is not because of our own efforts, but by the grace of God. We are spiritually able to stand in God’s presence, to have a living, dynamic relationship with our Creator despite our sin. This is a cause for rejoicing, since it removes the curse of sin that has broken this essential relationship.

The point Paul is trying to make is that because we are justified by faith, we know that there is a purpose in everything and that God is working, even through trials to strengthen us spiritually. We can rejoice in every situation. Suffering is inevitable for all human beings, and persecution is guaranteed for those who seek to follow Jesus Christ (II Timothy 3:12). What

separates us from unbelievers is a divine outlook that allows us to rejoice in suffering rather than wallow in despair.

The Greek verb rendered "shed abroad" literally means "to pour out." Therefore, Paul was saying that God's "love" was poured out into "our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us." It's very important to understand that this is God's "love." When Paul used the words "the Holy Ghost which is given to us," in verse 5, he probably had in mind the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts chapter 2) which was the beginning of the church. Since that time, believers have not needed to wait for the coming of the Spirit because He is "given to us" at the time we are converted.

In verse 6, at the right time "Christ died for the ungodly" or sinners. If people were able to redeem themselves, the death of Jesus Christ would have been unnecessary. God focused His love on the "ungodly," the fallen and sinful race of humanity. God's work in sacrificing His Son for sinful mankind who were "ungodly" is clearly a demonstration of His love for us. Mankind was weak and helpless because we couldn't do anything on our own to save ourselves. Someone had to come and rescue us from sin. Not only did Jesus Christ come at a good time in history, He came at exactly the right time—according to God's own schedule. God controls all history. He controlled the timing, methods, and results of Jesus' death.

In the New Testament, salvation is pictured as past, present, and future. We have been saved from past sins. We are also being saved, meaning that sanctification or cleansing is ongoing. Ultimately, we will be saved from the penalty of sin, which is the wrath of God revealed at the Second Coming of Christ (II Thessalonians 1:7-10). The Christian has been saved (past tense) from the guilt and penalty of sin (Luke 7:50; II Timothy 1:9) and is safe. The Christian is being saved (present tense) from the power and dominion of sin (Romans 6:14; 8:2), and at the return of Christ, the Christian will be saved (future tense) from the presence of sin and all its bodily infirmities that are the result of sin and God's curse upon the sinful world (Romans 8:18-23; I Corinthians 15:42-44). Justification is the past work of salvation; sanctification is the present work of salvation; and glorification is the future work of salvation.

Many people reject the gospel of Jesus Christ because they think there has to be more to salvation than simply believing it and putting one's faith in Jesus. The truth is, without believing in that gospel, and accepting Jesus as LORD and Savior, there is no other way to mend the enmity between man and God and gain His favor. This week's lesson has taught us that in order to have peace with God and enjoy His salvation we must be justified by faith and declared righteous, or not guilty of the sins that caused mankind's enmity with God.

Many Christians want God to prosper them, to give them hope. But God sends adversity, which produces hope. Many want God to give them hope so they can endure the tribulations of life. But God gives us the tribulations of life to produce endurance and hope in us. Many want God to prosper them so they will be assured of His love. But God assures us of His love by the cross of Calvary and in the times of our deepest difficulties. How God's ways surpass our own.

Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen.

Next week's lesson August 1, 2021, "Salvation For All Who Believe"

Background Scripture: Romans Chapter 10:5-17

Sources for this lesson: The Bible, A Study of Justification by Union Gospel Press, Precepts for Living - Romans Chapter 5, and The Present Word Lesson.