

Sermon 28: Romans 4:22-25: Saved by the death and resurrection of Christ

OUTLINE

Delivered up for our trespasses

Raised for our justification

INTRODUCTION

How would you end a discussion on justification by faith? What would be the climactic note that you would end on to close your argument in the most forceful way? Paul closes his arguments for justification by faith with a climactic focus on Christ's resurrection. For the most part when we think about being saved we constantly make reference to the death of Christ and the cross of Christ. We fail in our thinking to realise the significance of the resurrection and how it contributes to our justification. I volunteer to you that until you realise the way in which the resurrection of Christ informs our justification and salvation our understanding of God's grace to us in salvation will be sorely lacking.

In this last section of chapter 4 Paul moves from argument and proof to application of the justification of Abraham by faith. This shift to application is seen in verses 22-23, 'That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." 23 But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone.' We see Paul concluding from his discussion of Abraham's promise based God centred faith that Abraham was not justified by works, circumcision or law but by faith in v22. And then in v23 he moves to show that Genesis 15:6 was not written for his benefit alone but for the NT believer who like Abraham believes in a God of grace who justifies the ungodly. Paul then makes one parallel between our faith and Abraham's in v24, 'It will be counted to us who believe in Him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord.' Abraham believed in a God who could raise the dead, in this context probably a reference to the double death of his and his wife's bodies. And we believe in a God who fulfils His promises of salvation to us by raising Jesus from the dead. Paul then highlights two aspects of Christ's work for us in v25, 'who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.' This last verse is the verse we are going to focus on in our message today. We want to look at the two aspects of dying and rising which contribute to our salvation.

Delivered up for our trespasses

The first part of our verse focuses our attention on the death of Christ that He was delivered up for our trespasses. Let's begin our look at this point with this question, who killed Jesus? We see in this verse that Jesus was delivered up, who delivered Him up? Was it the Jews who killed Christ? Were they in control of the situation and Christ a helpless victim, the resurrection being God making the best of a bad situation? Was it Rome that was in charge through Pilate and Christ was subject to this world's then greatest power? Was it the devil who was in charge inciting Judas and the various leaders to do his bidding against his most hated foe? Who is the one who did the delivering in v25? It is God the Father! This is

repeated again in Romans 8:32, 'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?' Christ willingly gave Himself up, and the Father willingly sent Him and subjected Him to the various sufferings we see in the Gospels for our sins.

There is great significance for us in this fact. The relevance applies in two important questions: Is God in control when things go wrong? Is God in control of evil? Some of the biggest questions that perplex the Christian in this life relate to the problem of pain and evil. On top of this many Christians have been influenced by the present scientific paradigm to think of God as being in no way involved in His creation except in the area of direct miracles. This results in a view of God where when bad things happen we envisage a God who has His hands tied, who would like to help us but can't, and a devil who is all powerful and getting his will while God's will is being frustrated. What we want to show from this truth of Christ being delivered up by God is the biblical teaching of how our God is in control of all things at all times and is presently, even in the midst of apparent chaos bringing His will to pass. In other words, the greatest crime in the universe that has ever been committed came to pass as part of God's perfect will. That which appeared to be the worst thing that could ever happen and the greatest tragedy was in fact the greatest triumph and the best thing that could ever happen.

When we think of God's involvement in His universe we must not allow science to tell us that where the laws of nature are at work, or where man or the devil is working and willing God is not or cannot be active in bringing His perfect will to pass. The Bible does not present us with a picture of either God is working or man is, either nature is doing something or God is. God is so intimately involved in His universe that everywhere man or nature is active God is also active. He is not the clockmaker who makes a clock winds it up and throws it out into the universe to look after itself. He is the immanent and everywhere present Creator who is constantly sustaining all things by the word of His power, in every tick and tock of the clock.

Who then ordered this sin, exerted His power and ensured that it came to pass? Acts 2:23 (ESV) "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." Acts 4:27-28 (ESV) "for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." God planned the death of the most innocent man. When those sinful rulers murdered Christ, they did all that God wanted. Yet if we continue to look into this topic you will see that Pilate and his co-conspirators are viewed as having sinned, Jesus in discussion with Pilate says, John 19:11 (ESV) "Jesus answered him, "You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin."" This greatest of sins was planned before the foundation of the world, it was prophesied in the OT, and was brought to pass by God's enabling. But let me ask you, is God the author of the sin, and the approver of the sins involved? I bet that you have a knee jerk and instinctive, 'No!', in response. Even those who do not view God's sovereignty in the Reformed tradition would

believe that God willed the unjust death of Christ. And so it lies upon me then to highlight that the death of Christ was the greatest sin ever committed, and God willed it, and brought it to pass. God willed it, brought it to pass, did not sin, nor approve the sin in willing it, and wrought His good purposes through it all. This is a mystery that should extract praise and adoration, wonder and joy. The Scriptures do not reveal enough for us to know how everything works under the hood, but enough to know who is behind the wheel and what the final destination will be. Is God good in the willing of the worst crime the universe has ever seen? Yes! Is God in control in the worst tragedy that has ever happened? Yes! Were the men responsible for the killing of Jesus and God perfectly holy through it all? Yes! How? I cannot tell you, but He is God and He has done it, and we have enough to know these basic facts.

Our first application then is God's absolute power and control in the situations that appear to be spinning out of control. We can make this application to the various difficulties and sufferings in our own lives, and then expand that to this world's events as well. What appears to be a case of loss, defeat, mindless suffering, injustice was in fact the very opposite. The disciples were not able to see it at the time, the other people involved were unaware of the part they were playing, but God was bringing His grand purposes to pass. This is what we need to remember when we are going through difficulties. God has ordained it, He is in it, He is guiding all things according to His will. You will not get a satisfactory answer for every detail of what He is doing but you do have the assurance of His nature, His purposes towards you as His child, and this instructive example of great sorrow and defeat resulting in triumph and life. When Jesus was delivered over He was no helpless victim unable to swim against the tide but in the perfect will of God. This event that appears to be the triumphant surge of sinful men and satanic activity is actually man and devil doing the will of God that had been planned from before the foundation of the world. All their feeling of freedom and having their own sinful will was an illusion for God was in control bringing all things to pass according to His predetermined will.

The second part of the verse says, 'who was delivered up *for our trespasses*.' This statement answers another fundamental question for us, why did Jesus have to die? There are many different points of view about Jesus' death that we encounter in our society today. There are those who are from a Feminist persuasion that would view our traditional understanding of the cross that Jesus died to pay for our sins as child abuse, as a father deliberately abusing his son. They are unable to see how a God with any love in Him would inflict such a terrible punishment on anyone; and that the Biblical emphasis on Jesus having to die for the forgiveness of our sins as encouraging domestic abuse not preventing it. Some see the cross as a failure, the martyrdom of a political martyr like Gandhi. They think that Jesus was an idealist who was hoping to change the world through love, but his political career was cut short in disappointment. Other views that reject the emphasis of Jesus dying to pay our sin debt include: that the cross is a billboard for God's love not a payment for sin. The hope is that this extravagant demonstration of love and sacrifice will melt hard hearts and cause people to stop sinning and reform their lives. This view has a very high view of human nature assuming that human beings merely need to learn new things to become better, and that the power to become better lies within us and not in the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit in conversion. Another view sees Jesus' death as the

ultimate act of identifying with the suffering and oppressed; a great poetic gesture of the impassable One allowing Himself to suffer. Those who view Jesus as a political saviour and not our saviour from sin view Jesus as someone who identifies with our struggle, enters into it identifying Himself with their cause, and an empathiser to their revolution for emancipation.

Paul reminds us that Jesus died for the forgiveness of your trespasses. Justice must be done sin cannot be forgiven without being paid for.

Raised for our justification

We want to move now though to the second part of the verse, 'and raised for our justification.' Twice in the last two verses in this chapter, the climax of his argument Paul mentions the resurrection of Christ. As we scan the NT preaching of the Gospel we will see that the resurrection of Christ was a central part. Peter's first sermon in Acts 2 has the resurrection of Christ as a vital part of the message (Acts 2:22-36). Paul's first sermon in Acts 13 has the resurrection as central to its message (Acts 13:30-37). In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 he tells us that the resurrection is of first importance in the Gospel that Paul preached to the Corinthians, 'For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.'

Now the physical reality of Jesus rising from the dead is probably one of the most important proofs for Christianity. If you want to disprove Christianity you have to prove that Jesus did not rise from the dead. There are many theories put forward today to try and explain how Jesus is not in fact risen. The empty tomb has been seen as a problem by many people, because if it is true it points to the resurrection. So there have been a number of theories propounded. *Firstly*, that the women went to the wrong tomb because they couldn't see in the dark. However, this theory is immensely weak for the disciples Peter and John also went to the tomb, during the day time and found it empty. And if at any point the Jewish authorities wanted to show that Jesus was in fact still dead they could have merely produced the body from the correct tomb. It never happens. *Secondly*, there is the theory that the Jews or the Romans stole the body and hid it. Various things militate against this theory. Firstly, the Jews and Romans at no point produced the body later when the apostles began preaching that Jesus was resurrected. Secondly, it would be counterproductive to their various causes to provoke the disciples to falsely believe that Jesus was risen. The Jews were trying to keep the Jewish populace in control as were the Romans. Thirdly, you have the difficulty of the grave robbers stealing the body but taking the time to unwrap it and leave the grave clothes behind. All the while Roman guards are outside. *Thirdly*, there is the view that the disciples stole the body, either the women or the other disciples. This view is given little attention when you realise what would happen to a Roman guard who left his post, fell asleep, or lost his charge. The death penalty was handed out for neglect in duty, that ensured that the guards were attentive. Their lives depended on it, and we have no account of the guards being strong armed, and no charges brought against the disciples for anything like this. Also if we are going to believe that these disciples deliberately stole the body and lied, we have to go further and postulate that all the apostles were willing to

die, and be beaten for that lie; and that all the other 500 witnesses mentioned in 1 Cor 15 were deluded. *Fourthly*, there is the view that Jesus merely swooned on the cross and revived due to the cool of the tomb, and the smell of the spices when He was buried. That He shook Himself loose from the graveclothes, rolled away the stone, escaped the attention of the guards and was able to make His disciples believe that He had conquered death, being able to suddenly appear in a room, and keep His identity revealed in plain sight. John Stott puts it like this, 'are we to believe that after the rigours and pains of trial, mockery, flogging and crucifixion He could survive thirty-six hours in a stone sepulchre with neither warmth nor food nor medical care? That He could then rally sufficiently to perform the superhuman feat of shifting the boulder which secured the mouth of the tomb, and this without disturbing the Roman guard? That then, weak and sickly and hungry. He could appear to His disciples in such a way as to give the impression that He had died and risen, could send them into all the world and promise to be with them unto the end of time? That He could live somewhere hidden for forty days, making occasional surprise appearances, and then finally disappear without any explanation? Such credulity is more incredible than Thomas' unbelief.'" (The new evidence that demands a verdict, p259). The Romans who were masters and perfectors of crucifixion, experienced army men who had seen death and been trained to kill, these were the ones who had killed Christ and confirmed His death to Pilate. The fact that Christ's legs did not need to be broken to speed death, that He was stabbed with a spear to confirm His death, and His body released upon the word of the officer in charge. We should not doubt that He did in fact die and resurrect. The resurrection gives the best accounting for the empty tomb.

Josh McDowell gives the following accounts of the post resurrection appearances of Christ found in the Scriptures.

1. To Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9, John 20:14)
2. To the women returning from the tomb (Matt 28:9-10)
3. To Peter later in the day (Luke 24:34, 1 Corinthians 15:5)
4. To the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13-33)
5. To the other apostles without Thomas (John 20:26-29)
6. To the apostles with Thomas present (John 20:26-29)
7. To the 7 by the Lake of Tiberias (John 21:1-23)
8. To the 500 plus (1 Corinthians 15:6)
9. To James (1 Corinthians 15:7)
10. To the eleven and gave the great commission (Matt 28:16-20)
11. On the day of the Ascension (Acts 1:3-12)
12. To Paul (Acts 9:3-6)

13. To Stephen (Acts 7:55)
14. To Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:9)
15. To Paul in the temple (Acts 22:17-21, 23:11)
16. To John on Patmos (Revelation 1:10-19)¹

There are those who claim that Mary Magdalene had been hallucinating, however as we view this impressive list of post resurrection appearances we can see that the eye witness account does not rest on one person's testimony. Some have tried to say that the sightings can be attributed to mass hallucination, however, the conditions necessary for hallucination are not met. Gary Habermas has these points against the view that this resulted from Hallucination. 1. hallucinations are private experiences but we see 500 experiencing the same 'hallucination'. 2. Jesus appeared to various types of people, and different group sizes making the hallucination theory impossible. 3. hallucinations spring from hopeful expectations. The disciples showed no such high hopes but rather appeared to have their hopes dashed. 4. hallucinations are not sufficient to account for the radical transformations experienced by the disciples that they were willing to lay down their lives, 5. that cynical James was converted by a resurrection appearance, .6. and Paul, a persecutor of the Church. 7. the hallucination theory also has no accounting of the empty tomb. (Five views on apologetics). We could add as well that hallucinations are not able to eat, be touched, clung to, touched, etc which was the experience of the disciples.

Various disciples were dramatically affected by the resurrection giving further support to the resurrection. Firstly, consider Peter who had denied Christ, yet is preaching boldly on Pentecost. A man who had failed, who had entertained the possibility of going back to his old life of fishing, but was then restored by Christ to the ministry. Secondly, consider Thomas. We know of his doubt that he refused to believe unless he saw things with his own eyes. And when he saw he gives us one of the most profound professions of Christ as God in the Scriptures (John 20:28). Think of James, the Lord's half brother, who during Christ's life did not believe (John 7:5). However, after an appearance we see that he becomes one of the leaders in the fledgling church (Acts 15), as well as Jude another brother writing one of the epistles in the NT. Or Paul, a man who was well educated, zealous, and bent on destroying what he was already convinced was a blasphemous and dangerous movement. But when Christ appeared to him on the Damascus road we see that he does a 180 turn and begins preaching the very Christ he was bent on denying.

Add to this the holy lives lived, the selling of property, the commitment to missions, the willingness to be martyred for Christ. All of these truths bear overwhelming testimony to the Bible's claim that Jesus is risen from the dead.

¹ Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, (Nashville, Tennessee, Thomas Nelson Publishers:1999), p250.

We come now to our final question, how does justification tie up with Jesus resurrection?

Firstly, the resurrection of Jesus Christ proves that His death was acceptable to God for the payment of all of my sins. The resurrection establishes two facts. Firstly, it establishes that Jesus was a sinless sin bearer who had no sin of His own. This qualifies Him to be my sin bearer where anyone else would fail. If I decided that I would offer myself to die for my wife's sins, it would be a nice gesture but it would amount to nothing. I would die and because I am a sinner I would deserve death and not be resurrected. The fact that Jesus died and yet was resurrected proves that He had no sin of His own that disqualified Him from being my representative. Secondly, the fact that He rose means that every single one of my sins has been paid for. Have you ever wondered whether Jesus death paid for every single one of your sins? Have you ever felt so guilty that you were sure that His death could not have paid for this last one? Well Jesus resurrection proves that even that one was paid for and the payment accepted. If God had refused to accept the death of Christ as payment He would still be in the grave, the resurrection gives us the assurance that the single payment off His death covers all my sins.

Secondly, His resurrection is a pledge and pattern of my own resurrection. In other words, you will rise from the dead like Jesus' own resurrection and because of Jesus' own resurrection. Paul uses a technical term in 1 Corinthians 15:20, 'firstfruits' to indicate this, 'But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.' The firstfruits is a token expressing thankfulness to God for the coming full harvest, a token of the whole. "'Firstfruits' expresses the notion of organic connection and unity, the inseparability of the initial quantity from the whole."² And so Christ's resurrection is an anticipation of the rest of the resurrection harvest. In the context, 'Paul's thesis over against his opponents is that the resurrection of Jesus has the bodily resurrection of 'those who sleep' as its necessary consequence. His resurrection is not simply a guarantee; it is a pledge in the sense that it is the actual beginning of the general event. In fact, on the basis of this verse it can be said that Paul views the two resurrections not so much as two events but as two episodes of the same event'.³ So as surely as He rose from the dead so shall you.

Thirdly, because we are united with Christ; since He functioned as our federal head and substitute, all that happens to Him is attributed to us. Christ was under the curse of the law, He was condemned as He bore our sins on the tree. But in His resurrection He was freed from the curse and declared innocent and righteous. From guilty to innocent, condemned to justified, and cursed to approved. And as our representative He went through this experience for our sake so that we might experience that too. But not only did

² Richard B. Gaffin, *Resurrection and Redemption: A study in Paul's soteriology*, (Phillipsburg, NJ, P&R:1987), p34.

³ Ibid., p35.

Jesus experience a move from curse to approval. In His human body He also experienced a glorification. His old body could die, His new body cannot. One day we will be raised in the exact same way. The Holy Spirit has been given to us as a down payment and a guarantee of that final glorification.

These are the ways in which Jesus resurrection and our justification are linked.