

Real Justification Brings Peace

Romans 5:1

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

What will you do after the service is over? That's in about half-an-hour. I think a lot of us tend to feel -- what would I like to do? I really need some reviewing before the exams, so I really can't do much but go and get the old books out and get down to it. Some of us decide that way. Some of us who haven't final exams say, "I'd like to go and meet some nice girl or nice fellow. I'd still have the picnic lunch and sort of enjoy myself." Some of us feel we need some recreation and we decide that we'll go down and play football, or maybe swim this afternoon or do something that we enjoy doing.

Most of us, for most of our lives, have answered that kind of question in that kind of way. That is, we automatically take it as our right, to do whatever we feel we want to do. We run, and have run most of our lives like that -- on the basis of our needs. Now, dear ones, do you see, that's what sin is.

We've gotten so used to it that we think it's natural. But that's what sin is. It's living our lives as if we have no one to satisfy except ourselves, and maybe our wives when we marry, or our children, or our relatives. But it's deciding what we are going to do moment by moment, as if there is no one to satisfy or to confer with, but ourselves. That's really just sin. We live life as if we just don't suspect at all, that there's our dear Father, who is interested in every little thing we do. We live our lives as if there isn't that kind of Being anywhere in the universe.

You remember what it was like when you first left home? Your mom called you every half hour or every other week anyway. She checked up to see what you were doing because she really loved you with all her heart. She wanted to know everything that you were doing.

Now, we have a loving Father, who is interested in our moment-by-moment daily existence -- but we live as if He isn't. Now that's sin. Sin is just living as if there was no loving Father in the universe who is interested in us. Sin is living as if we only have to consult with ourselves in this life. Of course, God reckons that it's not lack of evidence that makes us think that way. He reckons that he's given us plenty of evidence. He's not only alive, but he is that kind of God, he is a loving, real, dear Father. He said, you remember, in Romans 1:19-21

"For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."

God looks at us and reckons, "Well, you people say that I look after everything carefully. You see that it can't be fairies that get the sun up in the sky every day. It can't be fairies that make sure that the spring time comes at the same time every year. You know fine well that I am here. You know fine well there's somebody behind the whole situation, keeping it going." And God reckons that we are just independent revolutionaries who are determined to live our lives without him, not only in little things but in big things.

It is true that we make not only the little decisions without God, but we certainly make the big ones. I mean we decide whether we're going to make a bomb that is capable of destroying a whole

people or not. We decide whether we're going to use Napalm on human beings or not. We decide what we're going to do on the big issues as well as the small issues. The Father has reckoned if I let these people go on like this forever, they are going to destroy the whole universe and make it again in their own hateful image. Therefore God has condemned us all to death. Of course we are all vaguely aware of that, even apart from hellfire preaching. We are vaguely aware that there's something, somewhere in the universe, that has condemned us to death. You know it because most of us have a tremendous sense of paranoia, or guilt, or angst.

Most of us in this life have a great feeling that something bad is going to happen to us. We have a terrible feeling that somebody disapproves of us. Whether we've heard a hellfire preacher or not, we have inside ourselves a deep feeling of angst and impending doom. We have a sense of worry and a sense of anxiety. Now loved ones that is just guilt. That is the human registration of God's condemnation of us to death.

We said last Sunday that our reaction to this is to try and find human answers to it. We have a sense all the time that we have no right to be alive in this world. And so, we're determined we are going to prove we have a right to be alive. We set out in our lives, most of us, to try to prove ourselves and justify ourselves. We have a feeling that somewhere, somebody in the back of the universe disapproves of us but we're determined to prove ourselves to ourselves and to everybody else and to try to overlay His disapproval with everybody else's approval.

That's the heart of all our wish fulfillment dreams, don't you see that? I certainly wanted to be Hop-along Cassidy on a white horse, if possible destroying all the gangsters in the western time. (Even in Ireland, we watch cowboy movies) and that's why, all of us want to be the slickest 007 in our wish fulfillment dreams.

We want to, in some way, establish our significance, or prove that we are worth having a place here in this universe. And the reason is, because we really doubt it. And the reason we doubt it is, that the Creator of the universe has condemned us to death for our independence. That's our situation. Most of us go around this life for 40, 50, 60 years with that chip on our shoulder. We're always trying to prove ourselves. We can't enjoy the football game because we're so busy trying to prove that we're the best football player in the field. We can't enjoy that little bit of talent that God has given us because we're trying to prove that we're the best artist that ever lived. We're the best poet that ever lived. We're the best painter that ever lived. And so we really can't enjoy life. We're so busy with this chip on our shoulder, trying to prove that we're invaluable to the world. "World, you just can't do without me! Even though the Creator of the universe is willing to do without me, you can't do without me."

Brothers and sisters, that comes to a beautiful, relaxing, relieving, life-giving stop, when you at last realize that God no longer demands our death from us. That's because his Son Jesus has died that death for us. There just comes a great relaxation and relief into your life when you realize, "God has justified me. I don't need to keep on trying to justify myself like this. God has justified me. I don't need this chip on my shoulder any longer. I don't need to prove myself to everybody. I see I am no longer under condemnation to death, because Jesus has died so that his Father could forgive me."

And so it's a great relief and relaxation when you enter into real justification. Real justification is what Paul talks about there in the first verse of Romans 5. This is another big day in our life because we begin a new chapter.

Romans 5:1 -- Paul is looking back over this whole meaning of justification that I have just explained and he says there in Romans 5:1: "Therefore, since we are justified by faith." It might be good just to pause for a moment and see what the deeper meaning of that is if you look at the Greek behind the translation that we have there. The word "justified" for instance, we are justified. You can see, even those of you who aren't able to conjugate English verbs and parse, you can see that "we are justified" is in the passive – it's in the passive mood and it means, we are justified by someone else. That was the heart of it you see. The moment Jesus died for us, that moment, God justified us. He lifted the death penalty for us so that we had no longer any sense of guilt.

Our method of justification is to try to justify ourselves by works and actions and achievements. The death penalty hangs over us, but we're trying to prove all the time, no it doesn't, no it doesn't. It is as if we're in a bus going 80 miles an hour and we've been told that in a matter of half an hour, you are going to hit a concrete wall. The bus is going to hit that wall, there's no doubt -- and the only way really to get away from that, is either for the driver to stop the bus -- for God to stop the bus -- or to remove the wall. But inside we're all laughing and singing and saying "Oh no, we're not going to hit the wall, we're not going to hit the wall, we're going to live forever, we're going to live forever."

We're trying to justify ourselves like mad inside the bus, when the only real justification, can be if the person who has power over death removes it from us. You see, that's what it means "we are justified." It means, instead of us trying to forget that we're going to face death at the end of this life, the Creator of the universe has lifted the death penalty from us.

So, he has justified us. Instead of saying you're guilty and you are going to die forever and go into eternal darkness, he says, "No, my Son has done that for you. I welcome you into my land of life. You can live with me forever." So it's us being justified by God, as opposed to trying to justify ourselves. And then, you can see something else if you are able to read the Greek. The Greek is "dikaio" and it really is the aorist tense in Greek, which we don't have in English. The aorist tense means that we were justified at a definite time.

The moment Jesus died in 29 A.D., indeed the moment Jesus died in the heart of God as the lamb that was slain before the foundation of the world, that moment God no longer held the death penalty over you and me. Do you see? We were free actually from the moment that Jesus died. God no longer held the death penalty over us. And that's what it means, "we were justified at a definite time." At a definite time a man presented His life to God instead of ours and at that moment God had no reason to demand our death from us.

So it's a very definite thing that is tied to a space time empirical fact of history. That is Jesus' death. And so, whenever Satan comes and says, "Oh no you are going to die", you point to the empirical fact in history and you say, "No, one Person has died for me, there is no reason for me to die."

I think there's another important fact about life. It's that although God is then justified in not requiring the death penalty from us, we ourselves are not justified. He has justified us in allowing us to live free from the death penalty. But that puts us back in the position of Adam and Eve at the Garden of Eden, where they were innocent. The only thing that would justify them in God's eyes would be obeying his word. He said, "Will you eat of the tree of the life of the Holy Spirit?" And that would have justified them. So it is with us. Though God is justified in forgiving us the moment

Jesus died, we're justified in his sight only when we do what he put us here to do, that is, to receive the life of the Holy Spirit.

You can see that though the whole world is accepted by God, yet the whole world can only be justified itself in going to God -- whenever that world accepts the spirit of Jesus by faith. That's what the last two words mean in that clause, "by faith". It's "pisteos" (in Greek) and it means those of us who by faith believe that Jesus died for us and prove that we believe by receiving him into our own lives. Then we're justified.

In a sense, we're all free from the flood judgment. None of us have any need to fear God destroying the world at this time. He has given all of us 70 more years to receive his life. But we're only justified in his sight when we actually receive the Spirit of uncreated life through Jesus into our own lives. That's what Paul is saying. "Since therefore, we are justified by faith." God is justified in forgiving us by Jesus' death. But we are justified not by Jesus' death alone, but by our faith in that -- through our reception of his Spirit into our lives.

That's why, you see, many of us in our churches believe all that we have just said. We believe God is able to forgive us. God is willing to forgive us. We believe the death penalty has been lifted from us. But, we don't experience anything of the life of Jesus because we haven't received him into ourselves. We still have trouble. We still have that chip on our shoulders. We still run around trying to justify ourselves to others. That's because we're not yet justified in God's eyes since we have not really received the Spirit of Jesus' life into us. So I think it's important to make the distinction. It's important not to wipe out faith but to see that you have to actually receive Jesus in order to be justified.

Now that's the situation. Paul says, "Therefore, since we are justified by faith." And then, what comes after the comma is a complete break in the book of Romans because here's what Paul is saying. "I have been talking over the past four chapters to you about putting you right with God, making you right with God." And Paul says, "This is done through Jesus' death that you are put in a right relationship with God. God, as far as he is concerned, is ready to accept you with all his heart. He justifies you, he treats you as righteous." Then from the next comma on, Paul is going to say, "Now once you are declared righteous by God, he is able to give you the Holy Spirit. Once you receive the Holy Spirit that brings about actual present changes in your life."

Now there is a big break there, you see. Being put right with God is justification. It's where God says, okay, as far as I am concerned, you are not my enemy any longer. But after that, when you receive the Holy Spirit, you are beginning to talk about sanctification. Now that was the whole purpose in God putting us right with himself. God didn't want us just to be friends with him so that he could say, "Ah, hello friend" and we would say, "Hello, friend." No, God wanted us to be right with him so that he could give us what he originally intended to give us -- the life of his own Holy Spirit. That's the whole purpose of Jesus dying for us, that we might receive the Holy Spirit of uncreated life and experience sanctification. Maybe we should explain again the difference between those two words. Justification is to make us and treat us as right.

God looks at John and says, "I treat you as right because of Jesus." And he only does that, so that he can give John the Holy Spirit in order to actually make him right and make him righteous. So justification is treating you as righteous. Sanctification is making you righteous. Justification is treating you as a friend instead of an enemy. Sanctification is taking you as a sinner and making you into a saint.

Now that was the whole purpose of Jesus' coming, brothers and sisters. It is not just to establish a judicial relationship of rightness between us and our Creator. It was actually so that we could receive the Creator's life. It's because of a failure to understand this that so many of us were put off Christianity in the past. We saw all these people saying, I am justified before God. I have had my sins forgiven. I am going to Heaven. But their lives were miserable lives. Their lives were less Christ-like than many non-Christians we knew. How many of us were put off by our parents -- not because of what they believed, (we realized that they believed probably good things), but their lives did not measure up to their belief. How many of us have been to churches -- we like the churches, the buildings are nice, the stuff sounds good -- but the people don't live like they preach.

Now brothers and sisters, it's because so many of us have entered into what we call our right relationship with God but we have never received from God the life of his Holy Spirit that makes us like him. And that's the whole purpose of Jesus' coming. Now you can see that in John 1, if you look at it, John 1:33. The purpose of Jesus' coming was not simply to put us in a right relationship with God. It was to put us in that right relationship, so that God could then give us the most precious gift he had.

There it is in John 1:33, "I myself (John the Baptist says), did not know him (Jesus); but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.'" Of course you see a lot of us get into the difficulty that we believe only verse 29. "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" And many of us stop at that point and say, "Yes, that's why Jesus died, so that my sins would no longer require the death penalty for me, and so that God could treat me as righteous." No, Jesus only did that so that he could then give us the Holy Spirit.

And loved ones, that runs right through the Bible, if you look at John 16:14 it comes again. John 16:14. Jesus, you remember, is talking about the Holy Spirit and he points out clearly that this is why he came. He says for instance, in verse 7, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." And then in verse 14, "He will glorify me" --how? -- "for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." The Greek word means "to impart it to you".

The whole purpose of Jesus dying is so that we would begin to receive the life of God into us. You find it right through the Bible. First Corinthians 1:30 repeats the same thing. I think it's important to see it because so many of us have stopped short.

Jesus' purpose is not only to put us in a right relationship with God, but to actually give us something of Himself and give us the very life of God. 1 Corinthians 1:30: "He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

In other words, Jesus is not only to die for us, to save us from being exposed to eternal darkness, but he is to be alive to give us the very life of God. And that's why you see, it says back in Romans 5:1 -- if you look at it -- Paul says, "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." This life that we are talking about, this sanctification that we mention, comes through Jesus Christ.

Now, that's the mistake a lot of us make. We admit all forgiveness of our sins came through Jesus, now our job is to try to be like Jesus. We have to try hard and imitate Jesus. Do you see that just as the judicial act, that set us right with God, came through Jesus Christ -- so the benefits of that judicial act come through Jesus Christ? That's what Paul is saying, we have peace with God through -- through what? -- through our own trying hard? -- through our own imitating Jesus? No! It's through Jesus Christ Himself.

Many of us make that mistake. We accept Jesus' death so that we are right with God and then we go on and try to live our Christian lives on our own. But whatever you receive from Jesus at the beginning, you continue to receive everything from him right down through until you meet God face to face. That's why Paul says, "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I think it's important brothers and sisters to see what Paul is saying there. Do you see that those words "we have peace with God" -- maybe it's first good to see that it's "with God". A lot of us are trying to establish peace with our own consciences. Or we are trying to establish peace with standards that we have for our own lives. You know that. We grow up with big, idealistic standards for ourselves and we beat ourselves to keep up to those standards. A lot of us are trying to have peace with those standards. A lot of us are trying to establish peace with the ideals our parents had for us. A lot of us are trying to establish peace with our own ambitions, we want to achieve so much in this world, and then we'll be satisfied.

Do you see that all that is a substitute for peace with God? What we really need is peace with God. If there is a restlessness in your heart, a constant strain, or a constant sense that people are getting at you, criticizing you, tearing you apart, or putting you down, do you see that it's peace with God that you need? It's not them at all that are doing all those things. It's that you haven't made things right with God and you sense his vague condemnation in your heart. Then you project it onto all other kinds of people. That's why you get antagonistic with each other. That's why we rebel against somebody when they seem to do something that is going to destroy the plan we have for our lives. We are projecting upon them our own resentment against God, because he has condemned us to death.

Now, peace with God is what we need. It's God's justification, not everybody else's justification. Now would you just look at one other thing? Do you see the words "we have peace?" Now the Greek really reads "echomen". It's a Greek word that gets a long "O". It's actually the subjunctive tense of the verb; subjunctive in mood, and it actually means, "let us have peace with God."

Do you see that many of us believe that Jesus has died to justify us before God; but we don't enjoy the peace that now exists between us and the Father? And so Paul is saying, "Look, since we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, let us have peace with God; let us enjoy the peace that we've entered into with Him."

Now many of us don't really do that. Many of us are dominated by a desire to be successful; successful academically, successful professionally, why? Well, we want to ensure our own livelihood and we want to make ourselves significant in some way in this world. We want to prove that we have a right to be in this world. Now Paul is saying, "Look, your Father in Heaven approves of you; he thinks the world of you; Jesus has died for you so that he could accept you completely to himself -- now God thinks you're successful even if you never do another thing after today. The Creator of the universe thinks you are successful; now stop trying to be successful in other people's eyes. Enjoy

the peace that you have with God.”

Loved ones, it is a life of relaxation when you begin to study Physics for the joy of understanding truth, instead of in order to prove that you are worthy of people’s respect. It’s so good brothers, when you can do your job at work, just to do it well to glorify God instead of to try to prove that you are a good provider to your wife and your children, or that you are successful. It’s so good just to enjoy the peace that you have with God.

Brothers and sisters, if the Creator of the universe accepts you, why are you trying to get everybody else to accept you; what does it matter about all the rest? If the one Great One accepts you, what about all the lesser ones? They don’t count. It doesn’t matter whether people think the world of you or not, if the Creator of the universe thinks the world of you. And that’s what Paul is saying. “Let us -- since we are justified by faith, let us have peace with God; let us enjoy the peace that we have with God.”

And the only way you can do it of course is by continuing to be preoccupied with God’s opinion of you. Where we lose our peace is when we start being preoccupied with the professor’s opinion of us, or our parents’ opinions of us, or other people’s opinions of us. Or we read Time magazine and see what everybody else is achieving, and then we begin to wonder, what are we achieving? And we begin to be preoccupied with what the world thinks of us.

And you see, Paul is saying, “Look, you’re justified by faith. Now listen, enjoy the peace that you have with God.” You know another thing we do in the midst of conversation -- we pass off one of those little self-congratulatory boasts -- you know how we do it. Maybe we are particularly sensitive people and we say to the person, “Well, I wouldn’t say that I am an insensitive person.” We are hoping of course that they’ll say, “No, you are one of the most sensitive people I have ever met.”

Or we really believe we are quite cultured and in the midst of a conversation we say, “Well, I am not the most uncultured, crudest Bohemian you could ever meet.” We are hoping of course, that they’ll say, “No, you are the very opposite.” Or we’ll say, “Well, I think I lack patience” and we are hoping of course, that they’ll say, “No, you are one of the most patient people I have ever met.”

We pick one of the few virtues we have, and we try to set it up so that somebody else will admire it. Do you see we do it so often, loved ones, to make an impression on somebody else? We want somebody else to think we are good -- just to notice us -- if somebody would just notice us.

Loved ones, do you see, that the Father of the whole universe has noticed you? The Father of the whole universe has counted all the hairs of your head. The Father of the whole universe has given his Son for you. That’s how much he thinks of you. Nobody will ever think that of you, nobody will ever think that much of you. Now what does it matter about making an impression on all the rest? What does it matter whether they notice your brilliant wit or whether they notice your scintillating personality? It doesn’t matter.

Paul is saying, let’s enjoy peace with God, let’s enjoy it -- and it goes on through all the other things. There are all kinds of little tricks we have, where we are trying to justify ourselves in other people’s eyes. Paul is saying, “Listen, let’s stop doing it, let’s just enjoy our peace with God, and let’s not try it any longer.”

We do the same when strain comes into our lives. Strain is what takes away peace, isn't it? Strain comes into our lives when we worry over the unexpected, don't we? We can plan for certain things but when the unexpected comes along, we're all panic-stricken. We just lie in bed at night worrying over the unexpected. We worry about something coming into our lives that we may not have expected. Now why do we do it? Well we obviously feel that we don't have an omnipotent person who can at the moment of that unexpected happening, weave it harmoniously into his plan for our lives.

Now Paul is saying, "Listen, since you are justified by faith and since you have a loving Father who is big enough to create all the galaxies in the universe and can at a moment's notice decide what he is going to do to get you out of a tight spot, let's enjoy peace with God. Let's not worry over the unexpected." But do you see brothers and sisters, we always get caught, don't we? We always get caught. We pray hard and we say, "I am going to do that." But then something comes along and we think automatically, "God couldn't know about this one, so I'd better get to it myself."

Now loved ones, you see what Paul's saying and what the Father is saying? He's saying, "Look, since you are justified in my sight by faith in my Son Jesus, I am your loving Father and I'll take all precautions necessary for your life; now just trust me." Let's enjoy peace with God and let the peace take away all strain. And that's God's will -- that we really accept the peace that he is willing to pour into us through the Holy Spirit. You have to apply it in detailed particulars in your life.

Would you look at somewhere in your life where there is not peace, would you? Pick some spot in your life where there isn't peace and then ask the Holy Spirit, "Holy Spirit, in what way am I not accepting the peace that comes through my justification in Jesus? -- show me." He will be faithful and he will show you. And then you should enter into that peace.

It's a bit like this. I remember (I don't think my wife knows about this) it was about three years ago. I was lying in bed one night and suddenly I realized I was frowning! Frowning? I was trying to relax and go to sleep but suddenly I realized I was frowning; there was strain on my face. I wasn't relaxing at all. I'm sure I've been like that for years and years and years. And I think a number of us have strain in our lives that we don't actually realize. We've grown so used to the lack of peace in that part of our lives and that's why many of us grow old prematurely. That's why many of us get sick when God doesn't want us to be sick. It's because we have all kinds of little strains in our lives, all kinds of lacks of peace here and there in our lives that really God wants us to enjoy. He wants us to enjoy peace in that area.

So, brothers and sisters, will you ask the Holy Spirit about that? Because God's word to us is, "Since we have been justified by faith, then let us enjoy the peace that we have with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." And that peace will come through Jesus. Look to Jesus and say, "Lord Jesus, I need that peace. Will you show me how to receive it here and now? He will reveal it to you; and then it's just a good life. This is what we'll be talking about -- maybe for the next 20 years. I think it goes on quite a bit in Romans. But sanctification, or the life that results from being in a right relationship with God, it's just a good life. Let us pray.