

I.N.I.

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost
August 25, 2019
Romans 4:1-12

In Christ Jesus, the One who exchanged His Righteousness for our sin, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Last week we finished our two month study of the 10 Commandments. As we mentioned the main reason God gave His commandments to us was to show us our sins. To lead us to see that we are incapable of saving ourselves. That is why it is important that we tell people that they cannot earn their own way to heaven; that it is impossible to stand before our righteous God on Judgment Day by ourselves since we have broken all of His Commands and deserve condemnation.

And that is what we hear the Apostle Paul tell us in the verses just before our sermon text. We read from chapter 3: **"THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NO, NOT ONE; THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS; THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS AFTER GOD. THEY HAVE ALL TURNED ASIDE; THEY HAVE TOGETHER BECOME UNPROFITABLE; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, NO, NOT ONE... THEREFORE BY THE DEEDS OF THE LAW NO FLESH WILL BE JUSTIFIED IN HIS SIGHT, FOR BY THE LAW /S THE KNOWLEDGE OF SIN... FOR THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE; FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD,"**

Paul is like a skilled surgeon dissecting sinful mankind and analyzing our malignant condition. Imagine going to the doctor for a full physical and coming back with this report:

Your mind: empty, void of understanding about God

Your throat: an open grave

Your tongue: covered with deceit and lies

Your lips: poisonous as a viper

Your mouth: full of cursing and bitterness

Your feet: wayward, straying and wicked

Your eyes: nearsighted, godless and ingrown

The prognosis is terminal. Eternal Death is expected.

That is your prognosis and mine. An honest evaluation of our sinful nature is—"nothing good lives there." Corruption, lies, immorality, selfishness, deceit all flow freely throughout our system contaminating everything. Even though we may be physically healthy and alive, with a clean bill of health, we were all conceived spiritually dead and corrupt and would remain that way all of our lives.

But all is not lost. Doctor Paul prescribes a remedy, a cure, the only cure for this spiritual disease of sin, a cure brought about by our heavenly Physician Himself: **WE ARE JUSTIFIED FREELY BY HIS GRACE THROUGH THE REDEMPTION THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS.**

We are healed from our spiritual disease and corruption by a radical removal of all of our sins through a washing of Christ's blood. We have Christ's righteousness now covering us and we have been given a heart transplant so that we are now spiritually alive.

Dare we boast? That would be as foolish as a terminally ill cancer patient boasting of his cure when he was given radiation and chemo to kill the cancer.

These were strong words the Apostle Paul was laying on the hearts of these Jewish/Gentile believers in the church of Rome. But they were not just Paul's words; they were God's words, God's honest evaluation of what we are like by nature and God's words of the only cure for the spiritual sickness that plagues all people. It is our ailment, but it is His cure!

To prove that these are God's words, the same words spoken to the people of the Old Testament, Paul now points back to 2 Old Testament fathers—Abraham and David. Abraham was called "My friend" by God. God says this of Abraham in Gen. 26:5 **"ABRAHAM OBEYED MY VOICE AND KEPT MY CHARGE, MY COMMANDMENTS, MY STATUTES, AND MY LAWS."**

Does that mean that God accepted Abraham based upon his good works? No, good as they were, they were not good enough! In Gen 15:6 God says this of Abraham, **HE BELIEVED THE LORD, AND HE CREDITED IT TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.** Abraham's faith clung to God's promise of the Messiah who was to come. Abraham knew that he could not stand before God in any righteousness of his own, for he had none. His only hope was relying on God's grace in the Messiah.

Paul asks in our first verse, **WHAT THEN SHALL WE SAY THAT ABRAHAM OUR FATHER HAS FOUND ACCORDING TO THE FLESH?** Abraham found that in the flesh he was dead in sins. He could not boast before God no matter how good or obedient he had been and in man's eyes he had been really, really good and obedient. Did he not leave his family in Ur of the Chaldees and travel many miles up the river to Haran and then leave his father there and travel even more miles to a land he had never seen before? Yes, he did this in obedience to God. Did he not let his nephew Lot choose the best land? Yes, he did when he tried to keep peace between his servants and Lot's servants. Did he not take his son Isaac up the mountain and lay him on the altar to sacrifice him to God at God's command? Yes, he did! If anyone felt they could have been counted worthy of God's blessings because of his works, it surely would have been Abraham.

But why did Abraham do all of these things? Why was he so obedient to the Lord's commands? Because of and out of faith. A faith that believed and trusted God no matter what.

So did God owe anything to Abraham because of his obedience? Not at all! Paul states in vs. 4-5, **NOW TO HIM WHO WORKS, THE WAGES ARE NOT COUNTED AS GRACE BUT AS DEBT. BUT TO HIM WHO DOES NOT WORK BUT BELIEVES ON HIM WHO JUSTIFIES THE UNGODLY, HIS FAITH IS ACCOUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

You put in your 8 hours a day, 5 days a week and you expect payment. It's not a gift; it is a wage, something you have earned. It is a debt owed you for the work you have done. Well the only wage we have earned, the only debt we have coming to us is **DEATH!** God has declared that **THE WAGES OF SIN—THE PAYMENT FOR SIN—IS DEATH.**

For the person who knows this and who believes that he cannot work to earn anything before God but believes that God justifies the sinner; his faith is accounted—credited—for righteousness. Remember Paul had just finished listing the sin and guilt which is common to all of mankind—both Jews and Gentiles. He then proclaims that God has sent His Son who bore the sin and the guilt of all mankind, who suffered the condemnation we deserved.

So how does that righteousness earned for us by Christ become ours? Is it because of our goodness? We have to be good enough to merit Christ's righteousness? Is it because of our repentance? We have to be sorry enough to merit forgiveness and life? Is it because of our church membership? Is it because of our being Lutherans, or because of our belonging to a confessional Lutheran Synod? No, no, no! It is alone through faith, which itself is a gift of God. Paul declares in Eph. 2:8-9 **FOR BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH, AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES; IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD, NOT OF WORKS, LEST ANYONE SHOULD BOAST.**

So---WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT OUR JUSTIFICATION?

I: What does Abraham say?

We are justified not by what we do, but by believing in what Christ Jesus has done for us!

Paul now turns to another Old Testament father, King David. David too was a moral man for the most part. God called him **A MAN AFTER MY OWN HEART.** He trusted God when but a youth and took on the feared giant, Goliath. He played the harp for King Saul even though Saul tried to kill him. He was so obedient to God that even when David had a chance to kill Saul who was hunting him down, David couldn't because Saul was still king, God's anointed. David was so filled with the Holy Spirit that he was inspired to write many hundreds of Psalms which beautified their temple worship. Yet, could David boast of his works before the Lord and look upon them as the reason for his justification? No! David too declares in Ps. 32:1-2, **BLESSED IS HE WHOSE TRANSGRESSION IS FORGIVEN, WHOSE SIN IS COVERED. BLESSED IS THE MAN TO WHOM THE LORD DOES NOT IMPUTE INIQUITY, AND IN WHOSE SPIRIT THERE IS NO DECEIT.**

The only one who is truly blessed is the one who has his sins forgiven, the one whom God has not counted his sins against him because He has laid them on His Son, Jesus. This David knew because this is what he believed. In Psalm 51 he cries out: **HAVE MERCY UPON ME, O GOD, ACCORDING TO YOUR LOVINGKINDNESS; ACCORDING TO THE MULTITUDE OF YOUR TENDER MERCIES, BLOT OUT MY TRANSGRESSIONS. WASH ME THOROUGHLY FROM MY INIQUITY, AND CLEANSE ME FROM MY SIN. FOR I ACKNOWLEDGE MY TRANSGRESSIONS, AND MY SIN IS ALWAYS BEFORE ME. AGAINST YOU, YOU ONLY, HAVE I SINNED, AND DONE THIS EVIL IN YOUR SIGHT -- THAT YOU MAY BE FOUND JUST WHEN YOU SPEAK, AND BLAMELESS WHEN YOU JUDGE. BEHOLD, I WAS**

BROUGHT FORTH IN INIQUITY, AND IN SIN MY MOTHER CONCEIVED ME...PURGE ME WITH HYSSOP, AND I SHALL BE CLEAN; WASH ME, AND I SHALL BE WHITER THAN SNOW...HIDE YOUR FACE FROM MY SINS, AND BLOT OUT ALL MY INIQUITIES...RESTORE TO ME THE JOY OF YOUR SALVATION, AND UPHOLD ME BY YOUR GENEROUS SPIRIT.

So---WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT OUR JUSTIFICATION?

II: What Does David Say?

We are justified not by what we do, but by believing in what Christ Jesus has done for us!

Both Abraham and David were Jews. The question needs to be asked. Is this justification only for the Jews, for those who were commanded by God to be circumcised? Paul asks that same question in our text. We read vs. 9-10: **DOES THIS BLESSEDNESS THEN COME UPON THE CIRCUMCISED ONLY, OR UPON THE UNCIRCUMCISED ALSO? FOR WE SAY THAT FAITH WAS ACCOUNTED TO ABRAHAM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS. HOW THEN WAS IT ACCOUNTED? WHILE HE WAS CIRCUMCISED, OR UNCIRCUMCISED? NOT WHILE CIRCUMCISED, BUT WHILE UNCIRCUMCISED.**

It is in Genesis 15 that we find these words concerning Abraham's faith being accounted to him for righteousness. God did not institute circumcision until some 14 years later and it is recorded in Genesis 17. What does that prove? It proves that God gave to Abraham the sign of circumcision as a seal, a testimony, a proof of the righteousness of faith which he already had. Circumcision itself didn't save, it didn't make the Jew better than the Gentile, it was only God's seal, His mark upon His people that they were righteous by faith, by believing in His promise of a Savior, not by their works.

So Abraham is both the father of all those who believe and are not circumcised—not of the Jewish race; and also the father of all of the those who are circumcised, who also believe as Abraham did in the promise of God concerning the Savior, Jesus Christ. So

WHAT CAN WE SAY ABOUT OUR JUSTIFICATION?

What does circumcision say?

We are justified not by what we do, but by believing in what Christ Jesus has done for us?

Are you and I Jews? No! But are we saved? Yes! Are we justified? You bet!

Mankind loves its heroes. We make our sports stars, our movie stars, our pop stars larger than life. The secular world has built its halls of fame and even our religious society has its saints. The Jews also had their heroes. Abraham was one of them. They made pilgrimages to his grave at Hebron. Many legends were told that made his fame and persona even more venerated. Some of the Jews of Jesus' day believed that Abraham received the promise and the covenant from God as a reward for his works. In fact they believed that Abraham's works were so great that they could be credited to his descendants.

Sounds kind of like the blessings of the saints today. People are taught to venerate and pray to saints for help, because they have more merits than they need and can pass them on to others. People will also say so and so surely is in heaven because he lived such a good life, he was such a good person. But God's judgment says otherwise.

"HE WHO BELIEVES AND IS BAPTIZED WILL BE SAVED; BUT HE WHO DOES NOT BELIEVE WILL BE CONDEMNED... "FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.

May this be our only confidence and trust, even as it was Paul's, Abraham's, and David's. We are justified alone by faith—by a confident trust in Jesus Christ and his redeeming work for us--in His life of perfect obedience for us and in His sacrificial death upon the cross for us.

**All righteousness by works is vain, the Law brings condemnation;
True righteousness by faith I gain, Christ's work is my salvation.
His death, that perfect sacrifice, has paid the all sufficient price;
In Him my hope is anchored.
Amen.**

